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THE SECRET FRIENDS
OF
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE



1419. e. 634

My dear Nellie
from her loving friend
Lucia.

April 9th 1895.

THE SECRET TRIALS

OF

The Christian Life.

BY

GEORGE EDWARD JELF, M.A.,

VICAR OF SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX,

AND SOMETIME STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

"OUT OF THE DEEP."

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TO
THE SUFFERING MEMBERS,
UNKNOWN YET WELL KNOWN,
OF THE BODY OF CHRIST,
WHICH HE WILL MAKE THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION
A GLORIOUS CHURCH.

"To the still wrestlings of the lonely heart
He doth impart
The virtue of His midnight agony,
When none was nigh,
Save God and one good angel, to assuage
The tempest's rage."

Christian Year.

(Wednesday before Easter.)

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THE SECRET TRIALS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

I.

THE PERSONAL LIFE.

PROV. XIV. 10.

"The heart knoweth his own bitterness."

OF the Christian life very much is hidden from the eyes of men, and known to none but the soul and God. The reality of our religion can indeed be tested, in some measure, by its visible fruits. The good works of some are manifest even before the day of Divine reward and of final separation. Though we cannot be certain about the sincerity of a man's words, or the expression of a man's face, yet after watching these for many years we can feel almost sure that such a one is utterly purposed that his mouth should not offend, almost sure that such a one is, as his countenance declares, bent upon serious things, given to soberness and prayer and courtesy. Though we cannot accurately describe the inner self

by tracing the outward acts which are done before our eyes, yet we are persuaded by our Lord's own warning that "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit,"¹ and that the spirit of charity towards God and man does show itself in charitable deeds. Still, on the whole, you need no teacher to make you acknowledge that we are living in great part, every one of us, away from human observation. It is not only the hypocrite who is half concealed. The hypocrite tries not to be found out, not to be seen in his true colours. The Christian walks in quiet places, not sounding a trumpet before him, because he loves to be unnoticed. The hypocrite covers his features with a mask because he is acting. The Christian, though never ashamed of God's light, feels that life is too real and solemn to be paraded on the stage of this world, and retires into himself rather than make a show of holiness. The hypocrite fasts, prays, gives alms in order to be seen of men, though within he is full of iniquity. The Christian's heart is so set upon God which seeth in secret, that he is content to be misunderstood and misrepresented by those who look only upon the outward appearance. And so day by day while he is drawing nearer to God, he learns what it is to have a hidden life, what it is to be lonely, though never alone, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,"² separate from very friends, while ever united to the LORD. He is taught, often

¹ S. Matth. vii. 18.

² 2 Cor. vi. 10.

by a bitter discipline and experience, to sympathise with the cares and griefs of others, and by a gradual victory over self, to rejoice with them that do rejoice. But all the while, in his own personal joys and sorrows, he knows that he must range apart, without one single soul to share his distress, or even to witness his agony, and perhaps with none who can enter even a little into the depths of that unutterable gladness, whereof all the fresh springs are in the glorious God, and wherein, like one that talketh with his friend, God answereth him again and again. But because of this very isolation, he is enabled and constrained to cast all his cares upon that loving One Who careth for him, to commune with Him day and night amid all perplexities, dangers, temptations, disappointments, revilings, afflictions; to seek to be approved of Him, whatever be the censure or the flattery of men; to go on walking by faith and not by sight, seeing with closed eyes, and hearing when there seems no voice to speak with him. And so, little by little, instead of the darkness which others fancy his lot must be, even *through* the darkness which he himself feels to be around him, there moves mysteriously forward "the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."¹

This, my brethren, is the spiritual life at its best; but you, even you who are in earnest, even we who wish to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our

¹ Prov. iv. 18.

LORD and SAVIOUR,"¹ you and I have so many hindrances, so little perseverance, such dulness of faith, we run so uncertainly, we walk so carelessly, our thoughts and affections are so easily drawn off to the delusive dreams and false consolations of the world, that we need every help we can have to continue in our state of salvation, and to take courage about the service of JESUS CHRIST.

Some such aid I propose to offer you, though in a way which may appear strange to some, by speaking at some length, and, if God permits, in several discourses, on those *secret trials of the Christian life*, which we have just glanced at now. For although, according to the Scriptures, we cannot fathom one another's hearts, or probe each other's bitterness, it does seem right for one who as a priest should minister to souls, to try "to comfort them which are in any trouble,"² and, for their own great good, to point out to them, or to remind them of, their spiritual diseases or tribulations, and to suggest the remedy. It may be that among those whose eyes fall on these brief words, there may be some too long forgetful of their high calling and of Him Who made them for Himself, who yet shall learn, however curious it may sound, what an excellent way our holy religion is, through hearing what its difficulties are, and how they may be overcome and changed into everlasting blessings. Even such,

¹ 2 S. Pet. iii. 18.

² 2 Cor. i. 4.

as they listen, may compare the sorrows of the Church which we must honestly own, with the pleasures of the world, which they have proved these many years, and seeing that CHRIST's yoke, though a "yoke, is easy,"¹ may have grace to choose His light affliction rather than those things which "perish with the using,"² and to reach forth to that exceeding weight of glory which is the one sure refuge, even in its hope and foretaste, from the storms and miseries, the restlessness and fears of sin.

And how, my friends, can we better begin our meditations than with those plaintive words wherein the Psalmist speaks of struggles and anxieties, of evil felt within, and darkness increasing without, and yet of personal confidence in God, of patient waiting upon Him, of unshaken belief in His willingness to pardon, of the thought of Him as rising above all other thoughts, and abiding, with a power unquenchable, amid the engulfing overwhelming waves of the awful sea? "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O LORD: LORD, hear my voice. O let Thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint. If Thou, LORD, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O LORD, who may abide it? For there is mercy with Thee, therefore shalt Thou be feared. I look for the LORD, my soul doth wait for Him: in His Word is my trust. My soul fleeth unto the

¹ S. Matth. xi. 30.

² Col. ii. 22.

LORD, before the morning watch, I say, before the morning watch. O Israel, trust in the LORD, for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his sins."¹

May He so redeem, and hear, and comfort *us*; and may He teach us, that *all* His paths are mercy and truth, however dark and winding some of them may be, how many soever be the foes we meet thereon! Brethren and sisters in CHRIST, let that holy psalm, with all its pathetic expressions, remind you, as it were on the very threshold, of your own separate being, your own individual responsibility before God, your own personal need of that "holiness without which no man shall see the LORD,"² and that faith without which "it is impossible to please Him."³ However sinful, however numerous in their ill doing those around you may be, a multitude, remember, will not defend you against that wrath of God which shall be "upon every soul of man that doeth evil;"⁴ and though you might have ever so many saints close by you, yea, even though Noah, Daniel, and Job should be with you, they could but deliver their own souls; no man could deliver you, or make agreement unto God for you.⁵

1. Therefore, first, members though we be of the

¹ Ps. cxxx.

² Heb. xii. 14.

³ Heb. xi. 6.

⁴ Rom. ii. 9.

⁵ Ezek. xiv. 14.

holy Church of CHRIST, belonging to His very Body, that membership itself lays upon us a great obligation. From each one of us an answer is demanded for the questions, "Believest *thou* this? Where art *thou*? Whither wilt *thou* go?" It is terrible to see how men will do anything rather than face those inquiries; how they will try to lose themselves in a crowd where their loneliness comes upon them worse than ever, or to drown thought and conscience in wine or strong drink, though "at the last it biteth like a serpent,"¹ or to fill their minds with "philosophy and vain deceit,"² which cannot take away the sense of sin, or to forsake the assembling of themselves together as if they *could* entirely forget that the day is approaching which shall prove "every man's work of what sort it is."³ Beware, I pray you, lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall not only from your own steadfastness here,⁴ but also from the place which your FATHER meant for you in the home of "many mansions."

2. And next, may we all recollect, not only in study and in worship, but in the common business of the world, that the life, and not merely the lips, must give the practical reply to Him Who knoweth the hearts of all men. The life unseen by all but, Him, unseen in our daily wrestlings with temptation except by Him Who strengthens us, unseen in

¹ Prov. xxiii. 32.

² Col. ii. 8.

³ 1 Cor. iii. 13.

⁴ 2 S. Pet. iii. 17.

the siftings of tribulations save by Him Who is the unfailing Comforter, unseen in the slow onward progress which He alone discerns and accepts as real, unseen in the conflicts of faith, the waverings of purity, the difficulties of prayer, the ebb and flow of self-denial and of self-control, yet marked by Him Who notes all these things in His book, the unseen life with all its little trials and all its great battles, this is the proof of our sincerity. Upon this God is looking even now, to see if He can trace, even in our imperfect souls, some likeness to Himself.

3. But again, think of the encouragement which even the most humble Christian gathers on his lonely forward march; our struggles, our prayers, our sacrifices, our advance over the stumbling blocks, our devotion to CHRIST crucified, our death while it is yet high day, all this is never, never thrown away. "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth unto himself. For whether we live we live unto the LORD, or whether we die we die unto the LORD; whether we live therefore or die, we are the LORD's. For to this end CHRIST both died and rose and revived, that He might be LORD both of the dead and living."¹

4. And so, once more, we are with Him and He with us, whatever be the trials. Nay, are not these "the marks of the LORD JESUS,"² faint tokens, though becoming plainer constantly, of a fellowship

¹ Rom. xiv. 7-9.

² Gal. vi. 17.

with His sufferings, of our following in His footsteps, of an increasing measure of His all-sufficient grace, of the part of which He is promising us in His own blessed resurrection? And surely that should nerve us to endure hardness, and to grow in patience, and to hold fast our hope. Yet a little while, and the whole multitude of the sorrows which we have in our heart will be for ever passed away, and no man will intermeddle with our joy, for we shall be living the deathless perfect life of Him in Whose "presence is the *fulness* of joy."¹ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the SPIRIT saith unto the Churches: "Fear *none* of those things which thou shalt suffer. . . . Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."²

¹ Ps. xvi. 11.

² Rev. ii. 10.

II.

REMEMBRANCE OF PAST SIN.

PSALM LI. 3.

"My sin is ever before me."

FIRST and foremost among the secret trials of the Christian life, as such, must be reckoned that personal anxiety about the soul which consists in the bitter recollection of past sins, and the dread which it engenders. I say the Christian life, *as such*; for of course, to the "children of this world," whose conscience sleeps, the chief troubles are very different; they have no disquietude as to their relationship to God, or their many offences against Him, or their eternal separation from Him hereafter; but when friends or kindred are taken from them, they are not only, as all of us are, "weighed upon with heaviness," but "utterly consumed with sharp distress:"—

"And make perpetual moan,
Still from one sorrow to another thrown."¹

And moreover, even the Christian, as a human

¹ *The Lotus-eaters.*

being compassed with infirmity, is greatly moved by these afflictions; only they are not his *prime* care, not that which concerns him most, not that on which everlasting issues are depending—all this is wrapped up in the remembrance of sin and the question of forgiveness.

And again, we place these first and foremost among the Christian's secret trials, because they commonly precede all other, for him who not only learns what it is to have been *made, sacramentally*, a Christian, but considers also, as before God, what he must think of and do in order to *become* one *practically*, in life and hope. For as, on the one hand, we cannot feel our absolute need of a SAVIOUR Who is God, until we have learnt, with the gradually convinced Unitarian, the imperfection of our best and least unworthy deeds,¹ so, on the other hand,

¹ The story is told in *Plain Words* (3rd series, p. 31) by the Rev. W. Walsham How, who knew the person in question. This man, who was very able, but was not religious, doubted about the sinfulness of man, of which he had heard so constantly in sermons. One day he took two sheets of paper, one gilt-edged and the other black-edged, and determined to write down on the one all the good things he did, and on the other all the bad things. After a time he took out the two sheets one night to examine them, and found the black-edged sheet nearly full, while there were but few entries on the gilt-edged. These last he then set to work to examine carefully, and, as he considered them one by one, he found something sinful and wrong in all but three, and was obliged to put them over on to the black-edged sheet. Then there remained three things on the gilt-edged paper. But as he thought over these more and more,

there can be no humble, faithful, acceptable progress on the narrow way, while our former sins remain unrepented of with that true penitence, which is the gate of humility, the pledge of faith, the beginning of that acceptance with God which ends in our walking with Him "in white" in the kingdom never to be destroyed.

And, once more, you must count this one of the *secret* trials whereby we rise nearer to God, because, though you can tell it to others, and obtain from the ministers of CHRIST special consolation for it, yet the *pain* of the sorrow can be shared by no one, not even by your SAVIOUR, since He had no sense of personal guilt, only of the burden of punished sin. Your own heart must be hot within you, and, while you are thus musing on the shameful past, the fire will kindle, and then you will speak with your tongue, confessing the evil and desiring the pardon.

he found that, though there was not in them positive sin, yet they were so faulty and imperfect that they could not be counted as good, and at last he struck out these three altogether. So then the black-edged sheet was perfectly full, but the gilt-edged sheet had on it—nothing. "And what did you do then?" asked a friend, to whom he related all this. His answer is worth remembering: it was this. "What *could* I do, but go down on my knees, and thank God for Redemption?" The author of *Plain Words* does not mention the fact of this person having been a Unitarian. This fact was conveyed to the writer by one high in office, formerly the clergyman of the parish in which this Unitarian resided, was baptized, and became a communicant.

The path, since it is not yet the "Via Crucis," nor the "Via Lucis," the way wherein we are "partakers of CHRIST's sufferings,"¹ nor the way on which we move forward to the revelation of His glory, must be trodden by us alone. It is like the valley of the shadow of death in its desolation; only, unlike that valley, it does not show me at the outset the LORD my Shepherd, walking with me to comfort me; when the comfort comes, I am out of that dreadful place, and "the darkness is past."²

And now, Brethren, ask yourselves, first, whether you have ever had such experience as this: and next, whether you ought not to expect it. Think what the Holy Scripture saith of the "everlasting destruction" which shall fall on "all them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our LORD JESUS CHRIST:"³ and then think of what sort your life has been. What is the record of many pages of your own past history: how little knowledge of God, how scanty a measure of obedience to His SON, how much ignorance of His Word, of His warnings, of His ways, how much wilful disregard of His plainest commands,⁴ what constant contempt of His declared will, how much forgetfulness of His pure, loving, self-sacrificing example, what long continuance in evil habits, perhaps in deadly sin! Surely it is, for

¹ 1 S. Pet. iv. 13.

² 1 S. John ii. 8.

³ 2 Thess. i. 8, 9.

⁴ Ex. gr.:—"Do this in remembrance of Me." "Love one another." "Forgive." "Watch and pray."

most of us, a terrible account; and the *most* terrible feature of it is, that only a part of it is borne in our conscience, while the whole of it is written in God's Book. Every oath, every theft, every falsehood, every impurity, every hour of drunkenness, every act of covetousness or vanity or passion, "every idle word,"¹ yea! there is not a thought in my heart, but Thou, O God, understandest it afar off—"not a word in my tongue but Thou knowest it altogether."² The recollection is appalling and awakening—enough to make the boldest and giddiest of us tremble. Or dwell upon some special sins which are more deeply rooted in your memory. These alone, whatever may be attempted in self-excuse, are fraught with damnation; for they were clearly the work of the devil, and you did them as his servant; for "whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."³ Or take even *one* of these, and depend upon it, apart from CHRIST, that one is enough to darken and condemn your soul. David was a man after God's own heart: yet one black deed—such a deed as is done in many of our towns and villages every night—rightly sufficed to make him miserable. We may not, by God's mercy, have fallen in that particular way: but what is our life, compared with the general holiness of David? What but a succession of falls—a journey with evil at every stage—a way of sin? Is there nothing

¹ S. Matth. xii. 36.

² Ps. cxxxix. 2, 4.

³ S. John viii. 34.

alarming in this? Jesus has died, you say, and "there is now no condemnation." True, but for whom? "For them that are in CHRIST JESUS, who walk not after the flesh, but after the SPIRIT."¹ And thus, so far from sin being less dangerous in these latter days, it is infinitely more so, for it is against the very Life and Death of CHRIST, since He died that we might "mortify" our "members upon the earth,"² whereas we are indulging them: and He lives that we may in Him "walk in newness of life,"³ and, instead, we are too often like those who are "dead in trespasses and sins."⁴

The soul listens, in spite of itself, to these reproofs of God; and then, though there is still the light manner, the proud look, on the outward man, there is real unhappiness within. You know it, some of you, though you would not own it to me. Well, confession is to God, whether made to Him alone, or in the presence also of one of His ministering servants—and instead of being forced upon any, it is rather the anguish-cry of a sorrow-stricken heart, seeking the relief which it cannot possibly bestow upon itself, and the lack of which is driving it to despair. Whatever may be said about the danger of interposing anything between the penitent and the Mediator—a danger which they are not likely to incur who attribute the whole power and authority

¹ Rom. viii. 1.

² Col. iii. 5.

³ Rom. vi. 4.

⁴ Eph. ii. 1.

of the sacred office to the Mediator Himself—persons have, as a fact, been saved from self-destruction by being enabled to express in confession the agonizing grief of never-to-be-forgotten sins, and to be absolved therefrom by the LORD of mercy, speaking by His priests as channels of His grace; and God forbid, that we should deprive any, who cannot quiet his own conscience, of this most comfortable help. But though I dare not keep silence on this, or neglect to point it out as a heavenly remedy for spiritual disease, we are speaking rather now of the secret affliction itself, and of the way in which it makes us commune with our own heart, feeling bitterly the plague thereof.

“My sin is ever before me”—this is the simple utterance of one that is heavy-laden; let us try to analyze it. I go on with my daily duties, mix with men and women, read, work, sing, look upon the common objects of the world around, seem much the same as my neighbours and my fellow-servants, share, to all intents and purposes, their interests and cares, and perhaps even their pleasures and amusements; but nevertheless one other thing is always present to my mind. Like that dreadful scourge of the body which makes itself felt at meals, in conversation, in exercise, in hours of rest or of labour, without cessation from pain, so (says the mental sufferer) do I bear about a cancer in my soul—the wearying sense of sin, which severs between us men

and God. Yes! and this is not merely the acknowledgment of our general human sinfulness, but of personal transgression. It is *my* sin which is ever before me, *my* sin whereby I polluted my body, or dealt unjustly with others, or became an offence to the little ones of CHRIST, or selfishly indulged my appetites, or allowed myself in bitter revenge and envious hatred, or screened myself from blame by lying, or gave way to profane jesting or filthy talking, or loved my money more than I loved my God, this haunts and clings to me now. Ay! and it is *ever* before me; when I wake up, and when the holy, awaking near me, is present with God, *this* is present with *me*: when I go forth to my work, this keeps me from labouring with my might: when others are around me in society, this makes me gloomy and dull: when I take my rest, this will not suffer me to sleep, or mars at least my better peace, so that I am "like the troubled sea,"¹ stirred and shaken below, even when the waves thereof are still and the surface motionless.

"My sin is ever before me." How truly those words tell of the distress, the burden, the feeling of unworthiness, the separation from the LORD, the real humility of penitence, the care about the soul as first, as that which the sinner dare not lose, though he should gain the whole world, as that which must stand hereafter by itself before the Judge, to receive

¹ Isaiah lvii. 20.

according as its work shall be! O royal Psalmist, casting down thine own crown before the Throne, may our self-abasement be like thine, our sorrow even as thine, of a godly sort! It may seem curious to some among you, who have never learnt heartily to grieve for sin, that such a trial as *this*, even so imperfectly described, must evidently be, should be supposed likely to prove a blessing. Yet so indeed it is—nay, it is hardly too much to say, that very, very few, who arrive at maturity, have kept their baptismal innocence so watchfully as to need no purging fire of sorrowful repentance. Most of us must come out of great tribulation, ere we can wash our robes and make them “white in the Blood of the Lamb.”¹ “Thou knowest, LORD, the secrets of our hearts—show us the evil that is in them, and make us to feel it more deeply than anything whatsoever in the world.” Will you offer up that prayer with me, my friends, and then consider why this path of distress is really good for us to walk in?

1. Lonesome and dark though it be, it is better, infinitely better, than the broad way of gay thoughtlessness and hollow pleasure. Bitter pain in the remembrance of his sinful life must have wrought in the soul of the prodigal son, ere he could form that blessed resolution to arise and go unto his father: yet it was the first sign of coming to himself, the beginning of the journey *homewards*. The agony with

¹ Rev. vii. 14.

which the drowning man returns to consciousness is said to be most terrible, while the sensation of the very act of drowning is itself wonderfully pleasant: yet what of that, if the one, however pleasant, is the precursor of death, and the other, though so terrible, the restoration to life? And can you hesitate, if it is your *soul* which is to be saved or lost? Satan beguiles us with the false sweetness of sin, lulls us into a false security amid our sin, hardens us by the soft deceitfulness of sin, and then brings us to destruction. But our FATHER smites us, even though we do not at first behold Him, makes us feel bitterly our utter want of Him, terrifies us by the remembrance of what eternal existence would be without Him, and then brings us by that marvellous distant attraction back to Himself. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."¹

2. Again, let us recollect the *end* of this present heaviness. We saw indeed that this path is not yet the way of the Cross, nor the way of light and peace. But take courage! it *leads* both to the fellowship of the Crucified, and to His glory which shall be revealed; it brings us to the precious *Blood* of the Cross, and it has the consoling *promise* of peace; it does not indeed of itself confer salvation, but as we move and cry, we hear the voice of Him Who never failed a penitent, and Who despiseth not the sighing of a contrite heart. "Behold, I have blotted out as

¹ Prov. xxvii. 6.

a thick cloud thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me, for I have healed thee.”¹ Verily, “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;”² and then, after pardon, grace; and through grace, growth; and because of growth, the glorious crown given to all those who “go from strength to strength.” Such are God’s promises. Is it not worth any pain to be able to lay hold of these? “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”³

3. But the vision of peace will not lighten the darkness at once—it is slack, as some men count slackness—it is sometimes very far off, till we come to measure by eternity rather than by time; and *then*, the time is short, and blessed is our hope. And so, “though it tarry, wait for it.”⁴ It will surely come; and the very delay is meant to make you more patient, and more penitent. For this is a thought not to be passed over—our present painful darkness is a part of the punishment of our sins. Most mercifully does God send it to us, to give us beforehand, while we can profit by the lesson, some idea of the hopelessness of souls which are lost for ever. Most mercifully does He strike us now, casting us awhile out of His Presence, that so we may flee from the wrath to come, and go after Him, if haply we may, in our benighted, desolate state, feel

¹ Isaiah xlv. 22.

² 1 S. John i. 9.

³ Job xiii. 15.

⁴ Hab. ii. 3.

after Him and find Him. Realize for one moment what it would be to be thrust out from His kingdom of glory, and then you will be sure that it is good for you to be troubled, even to utter casting down, in the kingdom of grace which is His Church.

4. And so further, as belonging to the wholesome discipline of the merciful and gracious Lord, this sore anxiety is not meant to make us despair. It is the devil who tempts us to this, and often when he cannot vex us otherwise, he tries to pervert the right ways of God, and becomes our accuser before the time, that he may make us hopeless and reckless. But God drives us into the iron furnace, that we may be brought out, after a little burning in the fiery flame, vessels meet for His use. He pains us now, that we may leap up, or at least may struggle up, to that godly sorrow which worketh repentance, cleansing ourselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God."¹ Yes, and if we only will look high enough, we shall discern that which we could not attain unto ourselves, with all our grief and all our striving after purity—for we shall see Him Who alone *can* cleanse us, but Who by the Blood of "His Son cleanseth us from *all* sin."²

Give yourself no rest in your sorrow, till it brings you into the inner chamber of your heart, and discloses to you there all its secret things. For then

¹ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

² 1 S. John i. 7.

“the consolations of God” shall be no longer “small with you,”¹ His Presence no longer distant, His peace no longer a mere outward message to your ear, but a Divine word for your very soul! Then the great fear will depart, and the storm which JESUS only witnessed, be followed, at the sound of His one mighty voice by a calm—and the peace of God will come to you from Him Who is our peace, because He is our sinless Brother and our perfect LORD, sacrificed for us—from Him Who hath set our misdeeds before Him, and our secret sins in the light of His Countenance, but Who also notes our repentance in His Book—from Him Who sees us while we meditate alone under the fig-tree, and then calls us out of ourselves, to find in Him forgiveness, grace, and rest.

¹ Job xv. 11.

III.

THE PRESENCE OF EVIL.

ROM. VII. 21.

"When I would do good, evil is present with me."

S. PAUL speaks of this as a law. Servant as he is to God, striving as he does to rule himself by the will of God, and to cherish always the cross and the example of the Son of God, and to walk by the guidance of the SPIRIT of God, he yet is constrained to own the presence and the working of another power—another self within himself—a law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and resisting the grace of CHRIST. Eighteen hundred years of Gospel light have made a vast change in the aspect, and heart, and hopes, and bias of mankind, and have trained already "a great multitude which no man can number,"¹ for the eternal glory of the redeemed, but they have not perfected human nature (for the simple reason that human nature is not a piece of machinery), nor are the individual Christians of this present time less hindered than those of the Apostle's day in

¹ Rev. vii. 9.

running the race that is set before them : nor can *we* expect to be free from such secret trials as these which pained a special saint of the LORD.

We are here on different ground from that which we traversed before. We were dwelling then on the bitterness of remembered sin : now we are brought face to face, as indeed most of us have been, without any preacher, continually face to face, with the present conflicts of that daily warfare, in which there is no release till the soldier rests, in humble hope of the crown of life.

One who is only a poor centurion in this grand army would yet desire to be of some help to others who have to endure hardness in the good fight. Yes ! and is not a priest *bound* to do what he can for the sick and the wounded, instead of passing by on the other side ? His work surely is for suffering souls, that he may bind up that which is broken, and strengthen that which is weak ? May God enable His servant for this difficult ministration, and may He Himself give us words which may echo within, and comfort which may lift us up to Him, through His own ever-blessed Son !

1. Now first, this trial, whereof we speak, must be felt to be a personal matter ; and it is well to say this at the outset, so that no one may think of another, even of a priest, as his conscience-keeper, for that he must be himself, or as his mediator, for that only Jesus can be to him. Warning, exhorta-

tion, counsel, encouragement, sympathy, consolation, even absolution in CHRIST'S Name from past misdeeds, all this we can obtain from those who are over us in the LORD; but the struggle, the march, the ascent, the peril, the suspense, the anxiety, the constant service and strife, all this must be our own. We belong, it is true, to the militant *Church*, and so are not engaged in a mere desultory contest, in which every man is for himself, without any aid from or duty towards his superiors and his fellows. But, for all that, we occupy a proper post, we fill a special place, in the ranks; nor is it merely that the King's enemies are our enemies; we have adversaries on that other side who are seeking *our* life: and while we cheer one another on, and listen together to the word of "the Captain of our salvation,"¹ we must parry and thrust for ourselves. Many men and women are witnesses in part of the way in which we quit ourselves in the battle; but who, save our own souls and God, can tell the real difficulties? Who knows the surprises, the sudden wild alarms, the hopes and fears, the hair-breadth escapes, the anguish of our wounds, the faintness, the fever, the awful thirst, the bursting of the heart? The Christian life is a warfare, full of such things as these—you will have to know them for yourself; you are feeling some of them already; "the influx of the perilous fight" is around you now; evil is present with you.

¹ Heb. ii. 10.

2. And this reminds us, next, that there are two modes of viewing evil—the one from without and the other from within: the one is like the painting of an artist, the other is the confession of a soul. We are very apt to look abroad upon the lives of others in order to understand the prevalence and the power of sin; but the advancing Christian—even though a Christian—draws his sad experience from his own home-field and his own secret chamber. It is “within my heart” that I learn the workings of evil, “the wickedness of the ungodly”—a meaning of the 36th Psalm, expressed by one of our English hymn-writers:—

“LORD! when my soul her secrets doth reveal,
All self-condemned before Thy throne I kneel,
And own my thoughts unclean, my words untrue,
Deeds nothing worth, eyes blind, and flattering too.”¹

And as the honest review of conscience gives us this life-like portrait of sinful man, and shows us the unholy actions and habits of our by-gone days, and the many misdoings, shortcomings, and imperfections which God beholds in us at this present hour, so also do we find in ourselves, through this scrutiny, wrong *principles* which, but for His mercy, might have led us utterly astray, and deadly *seeds*, which only His grace has prevented from growing up into poison-plants and tainting our whole character. For the infection of nature, as we are taught not only by

¹ The Book of Praise Hymnal (No. 295.)

theology, but by self-knowledge, "doth remain even in them that are regenerate."¹ What earnest person is there here who does not repeat the Apostle's sad complaint, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do?"² You kneel down and pray for humility, but evil is present with you, and pride rises up as a flood. You read about "the meekness and gentleness of CHRIST,"³ and wish to follow Him; but evil is present through a sudden temptation, and you are angry in a moment. You draw nigh to JESUS in His Holy Communion, and form fresh resolutions to be temperate and pure; but evil is present in the weakness of your will and in your lack of vigilance, and at night you have to reproach yourself for a fall. You go away from society and shut yourself up in solitude; but evil is not kept out by bolts or bars, it is present *with* you; in a little while it has wrought in you "all manner of concupiscence,"⁴ and you return for your life to the place where God called you to serve Him, beseeching Him to cleanse you from your secret faults, and to renew a right spirit within you.

3. Now it is just this which makes the trial so great and so real from the Christian's point of view—this inconsistency which he feels so often between his will and his deed; between his resolution and his

¹ Article ix.

² Rom. vii. 19.

³ 2 Cor. x. 1.

⁴ Rom. vii. 8.

performance; between the promise of his lips and the fulfilment of his life; yes, and more, between the solemn purpose of his better mind and the unhappy issue brought about by what he knows to be a "law of sin."¹ I say, from the *Christian's* point of view; for he who is not even aiming at the higher life does not feel this to be a trial: his whole will is turned away from God, his steadfast resolution is to please himself, his promises are absolute lies, which he does not intend to fulfil; he does not understand what it is to form a solemn purpose of devoting soul and body to JESUS CHRIST, Who died for him. But the Christian is sure that it is best to serve that LORD; the Christian does set his affection on things above; the Christian's heart does beat, though but imperfectly, in harmony with the Heart of God; the Christian finds delight in loving, worshipping, obeying Him; the Christian seeks, amid all sorrows and all cares, to be near Him. And yet, with all these joys and labours and aspirations, he looks into "the perfect law of liberty,"² and beholds himself ever failing, ever falling, running without patience, without perseverance, still conquered by the old sins, still lacking in the graces in which he was found wanting long ago. How can he be said to have renounced evil? How can the Heavenly FATHER regard him? How shall it be in the end? Well may he, well may we, join in the bitter cry of the self-abased Apostle,

¹ Rom. vii. 23.² S. James i. 25.

“O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from this body of death ?”¹

To Christians, this very cry seems almost to suggest its own answer. But ere we take up the triumphant thanksgiving of our great fellow-prisoner, let us notice how we may comfort one another, even in the agony itself.

Is not, then, this struggle which tries us so fearfully a proof that all may yet be well ? Is it not a good sign, after all, that we do thus suffer in our strife ? To have no compunction, no misgiving, no uneasiness about ourselves, to be defeated, yet not to be grieved at our defeats, to sink lower and lower without any sense of shame, to yield and not even to think it necessary to fight,—how much worse would this be ! We are now, at least, on the side of the LORD of Hosts ; the sound of His glorious Voice is very dear to us, though we do not always rally to His call ; to be with Him, or, at all events, to trace His footsteps, is a delight and consolation to us, though we are not faithful enough to Him, nor so ready as we ought to be, to follow Him ; to watch for Him, in the assurance that He will return, is our desire, though sometimes, nay ! too often, we are not true to it. But O ! what would it be to have no yearnings for His Presence, no standing on the tower to look for Him, no heedful hearkening to His commands, no fellowship with Him ? Surely the

¹ Rom. vii. 24.

Christian life, with all its tribulations, all its fightings and its fears, is better, infinitely better, than that in the army of the aliens. Look to it that you lose not those things which ye have wrought;¹ look to it that the contest be a continual one, and it shall be borne in upon you that you still are CHRIST'S. The men in the lifeboat are (they feel it themselves as those tremendous waves beat over them) in the very jaws of death; but who would choose to be an idler on the shore? See! their work is almost finished, and they will be coming Home! Those soldiers in the advanced guard are already in the forefront of the hottest battle; some of them are sorely wounded already; their danger is exceedingly great; yet surely, we would not have them yield? No, indeed! onwards under CHRIST'S Banner, to share their peril and their crown!

Yet, even as I fight, the old infirmity, the traitor-sin, seems too much for me, and mine enemies are round about me on every side, and the cry of distress is uttered again from my heart, "who shall deliver me?" And far in front from the midst of one of the already victorious bands, I hear the praise of Him Who in us goeth forth "conquering and to conquer,"² "I thank God through JESUS CHRIST our LORD."³ Our refuge, our strength, our hope is in God. Yet God is revealed to us in the Person of His SON. His Sacrifice is my refuge from past sin. His grace is my strength in this present battle that is against

¹ 2 S. John 8.² Rev. vi. 2.³ Rom. vii. 25.

me. His Intercessions, since "He *ever* liveth"¹ for it, to-morrow as to-day, is my hope for that unknown future which lies before me.

And His Name, remember, contains within it a pledge of our final success. He is "JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins"²—not only from the punishment of sin, but from its power; not only from the *general* power of evil, but from their own besetting sins; not only from those former iniquities which we have bewailed to Him, but from the offences of a lifetime. For each habit, for each act, for each sinful inclination, God "giveth us the victory through our LORD JESUS CHRIST."³ Consider each sin which most hinders you, and be assured that you can master it in your SAVIOUR.

But then, if you would realize this mighty deliverance of His, try to be His in earnest. Believe that He is in you, as truly as your breath and your blood are in your body; recollect, that as surely as your body would die without its breath and its blood, so would your spiritual death take place if CHRIST should ever leave you; and then, knowing this, you will not need that any man should say to you, Come to that Holy Table, for you yourself will feel that you must go, because you want His Life to quicken you, His Strength to uphold you. LORD! Thou wilt not send us away fasting, lest we "faint by the way."⁴ Our safety lies in nearness to JESUS; even

¹ Heb. vii. 24.

² S. Matth. i. 21.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 57.

⁴ S. Mark viii. 3.

in constant nearness. Be near Him in the daily study of His Word, and He will be near you in that daily struggle; be near Him in the worship of the sanctuary, even when there are but two or three and "the Form of the Fourth"¹ is invisible in the midst, and He will be near you among the busy crowds of the world; be near Him in that holy service which He appointed, braving the scorn of men for going out early in the morning to plead with His Church His ever-blessed Sacrifice, and He will be near you in your temptations and afflictions, to keep you by the word of His patience, and to make you worthy for Himself.

It cannot be, that we can thus be near Him, and He thus near to us, without our growing in grace. It cannot be, that we should be in Him and He in us without our learning to resist the evil of our fallen nature, and to be delivered more and more from its hateful presence. Not indeed till we be dead shall we be thoroughly "freed from sin;"² nor till the quick are changed, shall the earthly tabernacle cease to press down their soul. But if we are CHRIST's we have already "crucified the flesh;"³ if we are CHRIST's we are passed even here "from death unto life,"⁴ transformed into the Image of His glory. And

¹ Dan. iii. 25.

² Rom. vi. 7.

³ Gal. v. 24, i.e. by the act of God in our Baptism. Therefore our "affections and lusts" are to be continually mortified by our own will and deed.

⁴ S. John v. 24.

little by little, though the battle goes on, there is more power to overcome; though the inclination remains, it is more under control; though the tempter assails us, we learn "to withstand in the evil day."¹

And let these thoughts bring before you, burdened as you are and weak, one other source of consolation, glanced at indeed already, but specially suitable for the end of this meditation, to guard you against that despair into which Satan might drive us, in the misery of this "long campaign." We *wait* for final freedom, "for we are saved by hope." We wait for it, just because we cannot see our perfecting, for we are told that "hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"² We wait for it, because we know that hope is of the very essence of the Christian character. We wait for it, not with folded hands, but in our service; not as taking no pains ourselves, but as believing in the willingness of God to *fill* us with His grace, when we have used the earlier measures faithfully. We wait for it, not as fancying that we can afford to despise one single lust of our flesh, but as expecting, when we have striven manfully, "the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."³ We wait for it, notwithstanding all our hindrances, assured that if we will but labour diligently and daily, our "labour is not in vain in the Lord."⁴

¹ Eph. vi. 13.

² Rom. viii. 24, 25.

³ Rom. viii. 23.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 58.

IV.

THE FEAR OF DEATH.

2 S. PET. I. 14.

"Shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me."

HOW calmly the aged Apostle speaks of his approaching decease! how quietly and faithfully he connects it with his Master's prophecy which He spake thirty years before, "signifying by what death he should glorify God!"¹ With such quietness and confidence ought every Christian to be able to look forward to the close of the strife and to the Home beyond. Yet many of us—even many who are in earnest—would say, that in our own inmost heart we are afraid to die. We know indeed that we belong to the one army of the living God, and that part of the host have crossed the flood: we know, that many of those near and dear to us have already been shown what it is to pass into the unseen world: we count ourselves to be among those who are "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of" their

¹ S. John xxi. 19.

"body."¹ But still we fear the end. We fear it, not because of its pains, (for we suffer much worse pains in life than in death,) not because it is the great parting from our loved ones, (for we may be left almost alone ere that,) not because it separates us from earthly pleasures, (since these are but passing joys to the lover of God,) or from happy work, (for who would not rather be at rest?)—but because we must be all alone in that moment, because it seems so dark beyond, so full of uncertainty, such a vast terrific ocean into which we shall be plunged, because the very thought of living apart from this outward frame, in which only we have known life, is so strange and perplexing, because there must be many things which we never dreamt of here, because it will be, we cannot but think, such an appalling *change*: and because, beside all these occasions for alarm, it is borne in upon us that "*after this*" is "the judgment."²

It appears wonderful, indeed, when one considers this, that the fear of death is not more widely spread than it is, and that the human mind is not more disturbed by it. But this is to be explained by two facts,—the first, that most men and women live in utter carelessness about the solemn future, intent on present advantages, present amusements, present interests, and so never trouble themselves by asking what it will be, one day, to die—and the other, that

¹ Rom. viii. 23.

² Heb. ix. 27.

there are (God be praised!) many of His true servants who love Him so perfectly as to have cast out all fear,¹ and to whom, as to the saints of old, "to live is CHRIST, and to die is gain."² It is these last that the rest of us wish to be like—not like those who are too much hardened to have any fears—not like those whose conscience slumbers, to wake up hereafter as the worm that dieth not, and who, it may be, even ere they pass away, shall be overwhelmed with an horrible dread—but like those faithful, humble, contrite souls, who have learnt to trust in Him whatever happens, and who are ready, whenever He shall call them, to lie down in peace and take their rest, asleep in JESUS. Till we can be thus, our state is a real trial to us, and none the less so because it may not always be felt: if it were always felt, it would no longer be a mere trial, but a slavery, a despair, and a madness to us. No! it is only at times that the anxiety presses—but then how great it is! A sudden pang at the heart, a little fluttering palpitation, a danger unforeseen, the rushing as of a cataract across our life,³ the instant decease of a companion, the momentary stoppage of the windpipe, the sensation of inward sinking, bring forcibly before us, now and then, the stern necessity which is upon us, as children of the dead Adam, and compel us to face the question, "What will it be to

¹ S. John iv. 18.

² Phil. i. 21.

³ Compare Mr. Carlyle's wonderful "*Vision of sudden death*."

die?" I place myself beside one who is dying, and that struggling breath becomes a voice to me. I hear the sound of a passing bell, and it gives a warning to me. I watch that lifeless form, and its very stillness appeals to me: "remember my judgment; for thine also shall be so, yesterday for me, and to-day for thee!"¹ Then the man who names the Name of CHRIST looks at himself: and he understands what it is to have the secret trial of the fear of death. Be it remembered that we are speaking of a *Christian's* experience: may God mercifully show us the proper remedies and consolations needed by such a one—by one who does believe in God, and who asks Him to increase his faith—who has repented, and is repenting daily of his sins—who sets himself to walk in the narrow way of charity and self-denial—and who yet does tremble at that which is before him! But, before we consider these, we must begin by bearing in mind, that it is not a *sin* to be afraid of death. Our Blessed LORD was pleased to make such fear lawful to us by His agony in the garden the same night in which He was betrayed. By those "prayers and supplications" which He offered up "with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to *save* Him from death,"² He taught us that this shrinking is common to man, a natural infirmity. The sorrow indeed which He had to bear was greater and infinitely fuller than this particular

¹ Eccclus. xxxviii. 22.

² Heb. v. 7.

sorrow of our poor flesh and blood—for the LORD was going to lay “upon Him the iniquity of us all”¹—and that was His intolerable burden. Yet may we reverently suppose that He, Who was so thoroughly a Man, shared even this portion of our human woe. As the piercing of His tender Hands made Him acquainted with the grief of a little wounded child, so may we be sure, that He, Who tasted death for every man, could not but enter into the awful forebodings of its bitterness. It is a comfort to feel that sinful creatures like ourselves have something in common with the Bloody Sweat of the Everlasting SON. But is there not more yet? Can we not learn something from the very change in those petitions of Gethsemane? There is resignation even in those first words which He uttered as He fell upon His face: “O My FATHER! if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”² But the struggling human soul has risen in the next: “O my FATHER! if this cup may not pass away from Me except I drink it, Thy will be done.”³ And that holy submission now abides, for when He goes away and prays the third time, He says “the same words.”⁴ “Though He were a SON, yet, *learned* He obedience by the things which He suffered;”⁵ and this suggests to us our first source of strength.

¹ Isaiah liii. 6.² S. Matth. xxvi. 39.³ Verse 42.⁴ S. Matth. xxvi. 44.⁵ Heb. v. 8.

1. For do we not gather hence, that fearlessness, joyful expectation, well grounded peace, are the gift of God, to be sought for, like all His bestowals, by diligent prayer? If we should bow our knees "in all time of our tribulation"—say rather, if our only help in tribulation is found in pouring out our hearts unto God, there should be something very real and serious in our way of repeating the plaintive request of the Church, "In the hour of death and in the day of judgment, good LORD, deliver us." It is not a mere mourner's form, but the true desire of a Christian breathed to Him Who knows the *secrets* of our hearts, expressed in that most moving Service which is so familiar to us all: "Shut not Thy merciful ears to our prayer; but spare us, LORD most Holy, O God most mighty, O Holy and merciful SAVIOUR, Thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at *our* last hour, for any pains of death to fall from Thee." My friends, whenever the terror, whereof we speak, besets you, say those words from your heart of hearts, and you will have taken one step in the following of Him, Who "being in an agony, prayed more earnestly."¹

2. And next, we are taught, as we contemplate this example of the Captain of our salvation, made "perfect through sufferings,"² that as such holy boldness is a work of grace, so is it a grace capable of increase. Turn for a moment even from the Human

¹ S. Luke xxii. 44.

² Heb. ii. 10.

Nature of Him through Whom all gifts from above are granted, to regard some of those—men originally of like passions with us—whom He hath set before us in the way. Think of two of His chief Apostles. If S. Peter, as we have seen, is calm in the prospect of his cross, so also is S. Paul: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand."¹ Yet "Paul the aged," as he speaks to the Christians at Philippi, has grown in courage since that day—some six years before—when he wrote to the Corinthians, that burdened as he was in this tabernacle of the body, he still desired not to be "unclothed"—that is, not to pass out of the body—but to be "clothed upon"—to have the earthly body, that is, changed into the heavenly body—that so, instead of his encountering death, "mortality might be swallowed up of life."² Compare, I say, these sayings of his, and you learn that though it is natural to seek to enter Heaven by some other than the gate of death, it is better so to school ourselves in the lesson of confidence towards God, as to be able to wait with patience for the opening of that door, through which the LORD Himself went up to the Life which is for ever and ever.

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 6.

² 2 Cor. v. 4, cf. Pole's Synopsis (vol. v. p. 589.) "*Loquitur de cunctis Christianis, qui immortalitatem optantes, a morte naturâ abhorrent, et cuperent, si fieri posset, eorum esse qui in adventu Christi subito mutabuntur.*"

8. But further, our eyes, if we would be safe and happy, must be *fixed* upon that entrance, because it may so soon, so very soon, be opened. How watchful, every day, should be our remembrance of death! To "die daily,"¹—to live always as in sight of death and as expecting it,—is the best way to that death which is, after all, to be but once experienced by us. As nothing is worse than to thrust away the thought as unfitted for a life of present ease and sin, so nothing is more sure to bring us peace when we want it—at the last—than the Christian habit of standing on the watch for the moment when the Master shall come forth and call for us. Then He will find us ready, patient under the closing affliction, firm in the faith of God, and able even to rejoice through hope. And though our old alarm may not yet be overcome, both divines and physicians agree in assuring us that our present misgiving is no test of our probable fears in the actual hour of dissolution. When a Christian enters the dreaded valley of the shadow, it has lost its terrors. May we not say that God, in His love for our souls, suffers us to be tried before the end, that we may turn to Him more heartily, and serve Him more constantly, and so, when the end does come, may be found of Him in peace, penitent, zealous, obedient, and without anxiety? God grant it may be so with every one of us. "Let me die

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 31.

the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."¹

4. But then, recollecting who it was that uttered that pious wish—even a man, who, with all his noble aspirations, and glorious visions, and wonderful communings with God, yet “loved the wages of unrighteousness,”² and finally perished among the enemies of the LORD,³—recollecting this, let us strive after that holy living which is the path to, and has the promise of, holy dying. If now “we live unto the LORD,” we may be sure that we shall “die unto the LORD.”⁴ “He that is instructed to do the necessary parts of his duty, is by the same instrument fortified against death: as he that does his duty need not fear death, so neither shall he; the parts of his duty are parts of his security.”⁵ If we are “faithful unto death,” our death will be in the faith; if we are patient till we die, we shall possess our souls in patience as we die; if we keep ourselves sober and vigilant against the coming of our LORD, then the LORD when He cometh shall find us watching; and are they not such servants that He Himself hath declared long ago, to be blessed?⁶ If in the ministrations of our charity we exercise ourselves perseveringly while we have time,

¹ Numb. xxiii. 10.

² 2 S. Pet. ii. 15.

³ Numb. xxi. 8.

⁴ Rom. xiv. 8.

⁵ Jeremy Taylor, Holy Dying, chap. iii., viii. 2.

⁶ S. Luke xii. 37.

then, when time for us shall be no longer, we shall be cheered by the foretaste of that welcome which His own comforting words will recall to our memory as we depart in peace, "Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."¹ Then He Who has begun a good work in us, will finish it; but let us look to it diligently that this good work be proceeding in us day by day. There are only a few days left; how very precious they must be towards our preparation for death and for heaven! how priceless for the strengthening of that good hope, which we may still "have, as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."²

5. And this brings us to see what is, after all, the ground and root of this blessed hope. It rests not in ourselves, but in the Divine Being, the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection of our LORD. He stands before us in His Majesty, personally God before the foundation of the world. But "forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that *through death* He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."³ What a won-

¹ S. Matth. xxv. 40.

² Heb. vi. 19.

³ Heb. ii. 14, 15.

derful summary of our belief in CHRIST! what a consoling answer to the anxious questioning of our hearts! what a concise and satisfying expression of the hope that is in us! Surely such a word from the SPIRIT will teach us to be no longer afraid, and to take up the sense of the reality of death in a way which is absolutely free from fear. Is not *this* our safeguard, to be "always bearing about in the body the *Dying of the Lord Jesus*, that the Life also of JESUS may be made manifest in our body"¹—always so enduring danger and trouble in our bodies, that these may prove that mighty Power of God which is a testimony within us, that JESUS lives and is exalted to be a Prince and a SAVIOUR? For thus we learn, that as He lives, so we shall live also—since He is not like the Adam in whom we die, but the quickening Spirit "Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should *live* together with Him."²

6. And therefore finally, brethren, since CHRIST being raised from the dead "hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel,"³ death is to be looked for, not as the *finis vitæ*, but as the *gate* of life—

"Bright death that is the welcome dawn
Of our eternal day."

For there is a condition of living far more excel-

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 10.

² 1 Thess. v. 10.

³ 2 Tim. i. 10.

lent than this—where there is “no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain,”¹—a better country, because an heavenly,²—a celestial body, infinitely nobler and more beautiful than this poor frame of ours with all its weakness and decay, this earthly tabernacle, in which, whatever can be done for us, even spiritually, we groan³—a celestial body, “a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”⁴ As we think of this, a change comes over us, and our fears are taken from us. The dying soldier kneels before the dark mysterious door⁵—his wearied limbs are unable to move—his lips are gathering up for the last struggle—his eye is set—his heart is almost still: what figure is that which touches with its skeleton fingers his tired form as he nerves himself for the closing prayer? Look up, for it is the face of an angel: with the *other* hand, which has the freshness of an immortal, he holds back the curtain for a little space, and lo! it is not death, but life—not the gloom of death, but the glow and glory of life streams in upon that heavenly watcher and upon that victor saint—the bright light of the Everlasting God. For “this is the promise which He hath promised us, even eternal life.”⁶ The

¹ Rev. xxi. 4.

² Heb. xi. 16.

³ 2 Cor. v. 2.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 1.

⁵ See Sir Noel Paton's picture, “*Mors Janua Vitæ*.”

⁶ 1 S. John ii. 25.

tian there is no such thing as a death which can separate us from the Love of God or from His Life.¹ It is CHRIST Himself Who tells us, as no mere man could tell us: "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."²

¹ Rom. viii. 38, 39.

² S. John xi. 26.

V.

THE BURDEN OF THE FLESH.

2 COR. V. 4.

"We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened."

WE believe that the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity; for they "depart to be with CHRIST, which is far better."¹ But then this conviction of ours, this testimony of the HOLY GHOST, as to the disembodied spirits of CHRIST's own, may naturally lead us to compare with theirs our present condition, and, even without any conscious comparison, we feel that, in this respect too, the Christian life is a state of trial.

1. For, first, there is the burdensome nature of the body. We share this, it is true, with every living creature in this lower world of God. But the very fact that we have power to reason, and that we "have the firstfruits of the SPIRIT,"² while it enables us to endure in ways of prayer and patience unknown to the beasts that perish, does yet intensify

¹ Phil. i. 23.

² Rom. viii. 23.

our longing for everlasting rest and "passionless renown." And since we are still, with all our blessed faith and hope, frail human beings, we cannot but be oppressed at times by the ills we have in this flesh of ours. They seem *against* us. Our diseases baffle the skill of the physician—but worse, they hinder us, we think, in the things which concern our peace, debarring us from the comfort of God's House, and the joy of the work of the Church, and the refreshing exercise of charity. Or we are called, (as scarcely any but those who are, throughout or after a while, Christians, are called,) to life-long continuance in pain, and know with the Apostle what it is to be "pressed out of measure, above strength,"¹ so as scarcely to find intervals of ease for communing with God. Or, though He mercifully recovers us and causes us to live, we suffer such extremities of weakness as cannot be described to others, specially afflictive to Christians as making them fancy that their zeal for the Lord and their belief in Him must be low, when in reality it is but a physical infirmity. Or, after He has enabled us to exert ourselves, to bear up under a heavy grief, to string up our nerves to a high pitch of endurance, or to apply our whole self to some intellectual pursuit or some sacred study, we sink back in utter weariness and exhaustion. So true is it, my friends in CHRIST, that "the corruptible body presseth

¹ 2 Cor. i. 8.

down the soul, and the earthly tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth upon many things."¹

2. And therefore next, while we are thus in the body, we are in a state of *great imperfection*. Your soul indeed is unloosed, as often as you confess your sins unto the LORD, and receive from Him His perfect cleansing, absolution, and peace : but your body, though made clean for its necessary work below, by *His* most Pure and Precious Body, is not yet fully redeemed—not yet set free with the liberty of its celestial form—not yet, even in its most beautiful shape on earth, to be counted glorious, “by reason of the glory which excelleth.”² And just as we see in heaven and earth,

“ In all fair things around,
Strong yearnings for a blest new birth,
With sinless glories crowned ;”³

so very specially have *we*, in the awakened sense of our own fallen nature—so infinitely below what God meant and made us to be—the evidence of a desire, as yet bitterly unsatisfied, for a higher and holier life. “I long, O LORD ! to enjoy Thee thoroughly and truly, but am not able to lay hold of Thee. I would fain attach myself to heavenly objects ; but earthly and unmortified affections keep me down. In mind, I would subdue all things ; but in flesh I become unwillingly the slave of all things. And

¹ Wisd. ix. 15.

² 2 Cor. iii. 10.

³ “ Christian Year ” (Fourth Sunday after Trinity).

thus, wretched man, I am fighting with, and becoming a burthen to, myself; while the spirit is tending to Heaven, and the flesh to earth.”¹

3. And the earth is our *grave*: so that here we have another reason for disquietude. It is a body of death that we bear about with us. In the quaint pathetic words of the epitaph in Melrose Church-yard, “The earth builds on the earth castles and towers,” but “the earth saith to the earth, all shall be ours.” We have seen indeed that this need not terrify us, if we are CHRIST’s; for the crucified flesh is an earnest of the glorified body that shall be. Yet still, such as we are, we shrink from change even as change, much more from that solemn dissolution which we must experience when we die. And so though we are, by the attraction of our higher birth, tending upwards too, we know that as soon as we are born we begin to draw to our end; we have a burden to lay down one day, and till that day we cannot fully rest; we are not the slaves of death, for JESUS has subdued it, but we are, under His dominion, still in a manner subject to it, for we must needs die. Those diseases, those pains, that infirmity, that languor, which our flesh is heir to, are not only distressing in themselves—they are also signs and foretastes of that final bitterness or of that closing sleep which awaits us every one. Another year of such disease, a little longer continuance in

¹ “The Imitation of CHRIST,” Bk. iii., ch. 44.

pain, a few beatings less of our heart, a stage or so lower in prostration, and the life-strings must give way. We know it; and we are so constituted by the Lord our Maker, that, in spite of our better hopes, we are made uneasy. There can be no such fear for the Saints in Paradise, for "they have passed through the gate,"¹ and the chains which bound them to death are fallen off for ever from their souls.

4. But we are thinking of ourselves, and not of those, except by way of happy contrast to ourselves. And we feel, as we consider it, that there is another meaning to this "bondage of corruption,"² over and above the subjection of all creatures to decay: for it implies also a liability to sin, even in those who think themselves, with a strange presumption, sure to go to Heaven. Men tell us to indulge our bodies freely, but though they promise us liberty, "they themselves are the servants of corruption,"³ and they would bring us under bondage too. And though a steadfast Christian is not thus easily turned aside into licentiousness in the name of liberty, he yet is still clothed with that power which might enslave him, if not daily watched with prayer: and so he acknowledges this outward part to be fraught with danger and trial to him. He remembers that they who habituate themselves to carnal

¹ Micah ii. 13.

Rom. viii. 21.

² 2 S. Pet. ii. 19.

sin, utterly perish at last in their own corruption ; and so he is not high-minded, but fears even one act of wilful self-indulgence. Can he, with this need of constant vigilance, count himself in possession of that peaceful security which belongs to " the spirits of just men made perfect ?"¹ Can the skins and hangings of the tabernacle which are rent so easily, be nothing as a charge to the sons of Gershon ?² would they not rather be in the glorious Temple of the Promised Land ? How can we compare with this burden that " building of God," that " House not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ?"³ Nay ! think of those who *have* carried it, and who have finished their course, and are waiting, till the LORD calls, to enter into that sanctuary which God, not man, hath pitched. We who are in the body might still, notwithstanding our adoption, fall away ; but " he that is dead is freed from sin,"⁴ freed even from temptation. This is one special comfort in our thought of those who are asleep in JESUS—one real help to counteract in ourselves that fear of death which we viewed the other day. So far from " the dead in CHRIST" needing our prayers, it is we who should look for theirs—they have not the sin of the human body, or the ignorance of the human brain, or the fleshly partiality of the human heart, and therefore though they enjoy not yet that perfect

¹ Heb. xii. 23.² See Numb. iv. 24, 25.³ 2 Cor. v. 1.⁴ Rom. vi. 7.

consummation and bliss which belong to both body and soul in God's everlasting glory, their cry for us must go up more like the voices of angels, seeking only His Holy Will, and, in resignation to it, the eternal good of the militant Church on earth, and ourselves the soldiers whom they loved therein. But though we think of the blessed ones as thus "free among the dead," this very belief constitutes a trial for us who remain at this present, for it reminds us, by the contrast, of the living power of our lower nature to draw us down into sin. Surely we cannot but feel very often disturbed by this. "O what do I inwardly suffer," writes the devout à Kempis, "when, raising my soul to Thee, a crowd of carnal images rises up amidst my prayers!"¹ "My God! be not Thou far from me."

5. Yes, and is there not contained in this supplication itself, yet another element of trouble to be borne in this mortal life? S. Paul expresses it for us when he says, "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the LORD."² A little tene-ment has been lent us for a few years in this shifting camp—a camp we must call it, "for here have we no continuing *city*, but we seek one to come."³ We sojourn here a brief space as strangers and pilgrims, but our true Home is not found as yet; it is above, in the better country, where God is, the

¹ "The Imitation of CHRIST," Bk. iii. ch. 44.

² 2 Cor. v. 6.

³ Heb. xiii. 14.

Eternal Refuge and all-satisfying Rest of those who love Him. Our soul, when it realises truly its highest Christian calling, hath a desire and longing to enter into those courts of the LORD. "When" (thus it anxiously questions with itself) "when shall I come to appear before the Presence of God?"¹ What indeed that communion will be which we shall have with Him between our death and our resurrection we cannot tell. Even to the Apostle not much seems to have been revealed. But thus much at least we can believe, that as "God is a Spirit," so when we pass into the world of spirits, we shall discern Him by a new and clearer way, than is granted to us here where "we walk by faith and not by sight;" and believing this, we must feel our present state to be as darkness in comparison.

And now let us rise upward in our meditations, and mark the consolations and remedies which God has provided for us, to cheer us on, heavy laden as we are, in the path once trodden by His Incarnate Son. Is the weight of human infirmities and distresses and sicknesses telling upon us? These are not really against us. So far from this, they are a proof to us, in our body, of our adoption by the HOLY GHOST, and of the good ground of our hope. "If even the desire of *nature* is not void and without effect, much less the desire of grace."² Only let us pray more earnestly, and we shall come

¹ Ps. xlii. 2.

² Pole's Synopsis, vol. v. p. 588.

forth out of "the furnace of adversity, acceptable men."

Are we conscious, through the state of our bodies, of our present imperfection? Well, but did S. Paul count himself to be "already perfect,"¹ while the thorn in the flesh was buffeting him? No, but he kept, as we must ever keep, following after—he was still pressing towards the mark, assured that CHRIST's grace was sufficient for him : and is it not, after all, sufficient also for us?

Are we disquieted, because our body is still subject to death? But it is sin which is "the sting of death,"² and if we are penitent, faithful Christians, we need not be disturbed, for CHRIST has overcome that sharpness of death, and opened the kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Are we cast down, because we are in the flesh, and so, liable to sin? But we "are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the SPIRIT of God dwell in" us, showing forth, in increasing measure, His fruit in our lives.³

Are we afflicted by our banishment? Yet let us "labour that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him,"⁴ striving whether we live or die, to draw nigh unto Him by faith and holiness.

"Here in the body pent,
Absent from Him I roam,

¹ Phil. iii. 12.

² 1 Cor. xv. 56.

³ Rom. viii. 9.

⁴ 2 Cor. v. 9.

Yet nightly pitch my *moving* tent
A day's march nearer home."¹

But have we not, besides, other comforts and helps wherewith to strengthen one another?

(1.) It is possible for us, through the grace of God, to keep under our body and bring it into subjection,² and to let the soul have the mastery. If we will set ourselves not to make such provision for the flesh as would fulfil the lusts thereof, but such only as will enable us to eat and drink to the glory of God,³ then our body will be a willing handmaid to our soul, instead of dragging it back and hindering it in the race. Those who are not in earnest will of course laugh to scorn the notion of putting a check upon their appetites; but the Christian knows that fleshly lusts war against the soul, and he is ready even to fast, rather than "be brought under the power of any."⁴

(2.) But again, we shall remember that our very body is the workmanship of God, Who has fashioned us behind and before, and laid His hand upon us. In the noble words of a great German: "Faith does not recognise the philosopher's disdain of that body which the Creator gave us."⁵ God would never have made our body, except as an instrument for our happiness. And though we have defiled and

¹ Montgomery.

² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

³ 1 Cor. x. 31.

⁴ 1 Cor. vi. 12.

⁵ Bengel.

debased it, that is no reason why we should think slightingly of it, or deem it a small matter how we treat it. If it is a lump of clay, it belongs to Him : but our soul knoweth right well, that it is throughout fearfully and wonderfully made, the *most* marvellous of all God's visible works. I can try to keep this for *Him*.

(3.) And further, our bodies as well as our souls are His by the right of redemption, and He has shown this not only by having a body prepared for Himself in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, but also by joining our bodies to His own, and calling them, not us merely, but our bodies, His members :¹ and so, though oftentimes the law of sin which is in our members shamefully subdues us, and threatens to separate us from our Head, we learn, by diligent watchfulness, to glorify Him even in our bodies, since they are His, so that we must really continue what He made us, "partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."²

(4.) And as the FATHER and the SON have this claim upon our mortal part, and can therefore make it feel less burdensome to us, so too must we own that the HOLY SPIRIT has this in possession, and that so solemnly and certainly, that the body, though called a *tabernacle* only for our soul, is consecrated as a *temple* for Him. "Know ye not that your body is

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 15.

² 2 S. Pet. i. 4.

the Temple of the HOLY GHOST which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"¹ Surely there must be sounds of joy, and not only of groaning, in the sanctuary wherein He dwells!

(5.) And do we not learn, from this intimate fellowship which we have with the ever Blessed Trinity, that we were made, even outwardly, for eternity rather than for time, and that, because of CHRIST'S Redemption and the SPIRIT'S Sanctification, our bodies will be the same hereafter, though changed and glorified? And thus what is a burden here, will there be only as the wings of the seraphim, wafting us upward to our God. And therefore though on earth we cannot fly, we can at least be faithful to His bestowals, and move towards Him.

(6.) And so lastly, if we cannot always rejoice in the troubles which we thus inherit, nor always realise our nearness to God because of these bodily distresses, let us at least bear in mind, as good Christian men, that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared" with that "glory which shall be revealed in us."² We shall exchange "the bondage of corruption" for "the glorious liberty of the children of God"³—"our light afflictions" for "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"⁴—the corruption, the dishonour, the weakness of our failing flesh, for the incorruption, the glory, the

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 19.

² Rom. viii. 18.

³ Rom. viii. 21.

⁴ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

power of the body celestial.¹ Then, even in these limbs of ours, we shall be ransomed from the grave, for ever freed from decay, from mortality, from passion, from pain, from sorrow, and from sin. Only let us now be patient—distressed, wandering, faint on earth, yet having our conversation in Heaven, hoping all things, believing all things, enduring all things, always intent upon that day when we too shall be delivered from the burden of the flesh, always endeavouring to keep ourselves in closest union with the LORD of life, that so, when He cometh, He may “change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious Body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”²

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43.

² Phil. iii. 21.

VI.

THE SUBTILTY OF SELF.

JEREMIAH XVII. 9.

*"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked :
who can know it ?"*

EVEN when, as Christians, we are trying to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, and to be vigilant and active against the crafts and assaults of the devil, we must be prepared for another trial—which is no trial to the foolish and the disobedient, but a very heavy one to the servants of God,—*the subtilty of self*. It would doubtless startle many of us to be told that we are often selfish. But just as the shining light discovers to us, when we approach it, traces of old hurts and signs of present disease, so, the closer we come to God, the more clearly we discern not only the wounds and scars of our former sins, but also symptoms, hitherto unnoticed, of spiritual danger and personal imperfection. Then we learn to think of something nearer to ourselves than the peril of those who are openly and wilfully living unto themselves; we learn, by the more intimate know-

ledge of our own hearts, not to be "high-minded," but to "fear;"¹ we learn, that in the secret citadel of our souls, where so much scheming goes on against us, we must "watch and pray."

For mark these words in the Book of God. They were originally spoken by a prophet, who dwelt among a rebellious and ungrateful people—a people whose sin was "written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond"²—a people who had forsaken the LORD. Against these, whose heart had thus departed from Him, till they had brought themselves to trust in an arm of flesh, the curse was uttered—causeless it should not come. "Blessed" indeed, (in contrast to these,) "is the man," so God declares, "who trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is."³ Then, noting this awful difference, a difference for eternity and not for time, the man of God is anxious for himself as well as for his own dear Israel, and he cries aloud, in the sense of the natural depravity common to us all: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: *who* can know it?" The Divine answer comes, as we shall see; and the prophet prays more earnestly, in deep self-abasement, penitence, and faith.

But I ask you to consider now the trial itself, as it concerns us the members of CHRIST and children of God. Is not the warning applicable to those who

¹ Rom. xi. 20.

² Jer. xvii. 1.

³ Jer. xvii. 7.

live as *we* do under the full light of the glorious Gospel, possessing graces and privileges which were utterly unknown to the Israelites of old, striving, when we are at our best, to devote to the LORD all the powers of body, soul, and spirit, and yet falling far short of that singleness of heart, that guileless thorough sincerity, which prove the true Israelite, the real son and daughter of chosen Judah, "whose praise is not of men, but of God?"¹

Assuredly all of us need to be put on our guard—and, from the present point of view, those especially who have learnt something of the narrow way, and have been taught the excellence of the fear of God, and have even been allowed to draw nigh by faith to JESUS in His Holy Communion. For we are thinking now, (be it remembered,) not of those who are living in high-handed sin, or deadly impurity—not of those who are so thoroughly covetous as to have become, (to use the solemn phrase of Holy Scripture,²) idolaters, worshippers of self—nor of those who are so absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure, that they have lost all concern for others in their false love of self—nor yet of those, whose pride before God and man is so great, that they stand ever wrapped up in the conceit of self—nor yet of those, who, though they enter the courts of the LORD's House, are so intent upon their own dress or appearance, that, if they had their way, men and women

¹ Rom. ii. 29.

² Eph. v. 5; Col. iii. 5.

would be taken up with *them*, rather than with the care of their souls and the glory of God—nor yet of those who in the contemplation of their own cleverness, or learning, or scientific attainments, or mechanical skill, have reared up unto themselves an image, never absent from their sight. Of all these one can speak only to condemn them, trembling all the while lest one should, some day, be like these or worse than these, through the unchecked growth of the little seed of evil. Rather, it is the presence of this little seed itself—the *inherent* power of this little leaven—against which we have so carefully to guard. And it is *within* that the trial is felt. The clergy may indeed help us to probe the sore—and to detect the workings of the hidden poison—and may, by God's grace, suggest to us some antidotes and healing medicines. But "a man's *heart* is sometimes wont to tell him more than seven watchmen that sit above in a high tower."¹ When we begin to think, and to question with ourselves, and to examine our own past lives, we find what a subtle thing this self of ours is.

For then it is borne in upon us, how very often we are acting from mixed motives—how, instead of pleasing our neighbour for his good to edification,² we really do so from cowardice or for the sake of an easy life—how, when God says to us that our love is to be "without dissimulation,"³ we are very insin-

¹ Ecclus. xxxvii. 14.

² Rom. xv. 2.

³ Rom. xii. 9.

cere in our expressions of affection—how, when we are exhorted to “do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus,”¹ we are apt again and again to do things in our own name, thinking that men will receive us, and afraid of being simply faithful—how, in our arguments with others, we seek for triumph rather than for truth—how, while protesting against unfairness, we are, in fact, jealous of a brother or sister, a fellow-priest or a fellow-servant—how, even in most sacred work, self-consciousness seems to cling to us. In our worship, our labour, our enjoyments, our family matters, there is found too often the same reference to ourselves. We do a Christian and thankful act, but mar it in a manner by hasty judgment of others, or by placing—through want of thought—a stumbling-block in our weak brother’s way. We punish children out of pique or anger, instead of correcting them betimes, to cure them, for the Lord’s sake, of a grave fault. We are ready for deeds of charity—but they must be done after our own liking, and for objects which we choose, not at the special call of God, or at the request of His ministers—and then we wonder perhaps how it is that we miss the peace granted to those who while often performing, in secret places, little kindnesses which no man knoweth, no nor their own left hand, yet make it part of their daily prayer that God would show them where their help is needed, and when and

¹ Col. iii. 17.

what they should sacrifice for Him. We listen to the quiet Voice of the HOLY GHOST, as He sets before us, it may be this very day, those graces of His which imply, each one of them, such *self-renunciation*,—lowliness, meekness, forbearance, long-suffering; and the record of another week brings out a far different tale concerning us—self-exaltation, a seeking for chief rooms, desire for honour first instead of honour afterwards, impatience towards others. We think on our ways, and search out our misdoings, but how blind we are, how unwisely tender, how very partial towards ourselves! The clear eyes are set on other objects and will not look within. We preach and preach, and murmur because we have so little success, instead of sowing the good seed faithfully and with many prayers, and then leaving the result to God. I fear, if we would be honest with ourselves, that we should find S. Paul's complaint of far wider application than we thought as we listened to the words: "*All seek their own, not the things that are JESUS CHRIST'S.*"¹

So desperately does sin cleave to the human heart—so reluctantly does Satan let go his hold upon us, even when he sees that we are almost safe. And since to be almost safe is not to be eternally saved, it behoves us much to grapple with this difficulty, and not to let so subtle an influence spread over our spiritual life. A few deadly drops are perilous

¹ Phil. ii. 21.

—we must find something at once to counteract them.

Yet ere we touch on the remedies which we may use against this creeping poison, let us be re-assured by a few thoughts. God grant they may prove to some an echo, however feeble, of the words of the Good Physician, coming to us on our bed of sickness, and telling us we may recover and be perfected in body and soul !

1. First, then, generally, beware of *morbidness* in religion. If the main bent of our minds is towards God, He will not, we trust, be extreme to mark what is done amiss, should we fall short (and who does *not* fall short ?) in duty. If, on the whole, the beat of our heart is steady in its love for Him, He will still hold our hand in His own, though the pulse be fevered in our infirmity. If, as Wordsworth says, in one of the grandest and most comforting passages ever written by uninspired man, we are cherishing

. "an *habitual* dread
Of aught unworthily conceived, ill done, or left undone
To the dishonour of His Holy Name,"¹

may we not believe that He will be very merciful to us when the force of our fallen nature proves too strong for the habit of grace ? Will He not, as we repent, strengthen us, and give *more* grace ?

2. Then too, fear not lest you be counted a self-seeker, because in setting a good end before you,

¹ "The Excursion," Bk. iv.

you compass also a temporal benefit. If, in going to visit a sick friend, I happen to find some profit to myself, that does not make my service a dishonest one. Even a heathen taught us this.¹ How much more may we feel it to be true, to whom it has been shown by the word of wisdom, that if we "remember the end," we shall "never do amiss,"² and by the word of revelation, that if we would be safe, we have but to "do all to the glory of God!"³

3. So, more particularly, do not make yourself miserable by fancying that you aim only at human approbation. Which do you *love* most? The praise of men, or the praise of God? You fast, we will suppose, because you wish to mortify some unruly appetite: or you go to the prayers on a weekday, because you believe that CHRIST is with His two or three. Then some of your friends notice this, and instead of laughing at it, as so many do, they commend you for it. Are you to leave off the practice on that account? By no means. Must we forfeit our blessing, because we are helped towards it? If we serve God faithfully, it will often happen that good men will speak well of us; and instead of reckoning this an evil, we should feel that it is a real encouragement from God Himself.

4. Again, do not leave off doing an action of religion, because you find that you are thinking of yourself. For instance, singing in the House of

¹ Seneca.

² Eccles. vii. 36.

³ 1 Cor. x. 31.

God may become a snare to us. Are we therefore, in our humility, to silence the best member that we have? Rather say secretly such words as these, "To Thee alone, O LORD," and then go forward with the duty, and the cry of your voice shall ascend as an offering very precious to "the ears of the LORD of Sabaoth." Such was the rule which S. Bernard taught us, says Jeremy Taylor, "for when the devil observing him to preach excellently, and to do much benefit to his hearers, tempted him to vain-glory, hoping that the good man to avoid that would cease preaching, he gave this answer only: 'I neither began for thee, neither for thee will I make an end.'"¹

5. And as, thus correcting our intention, we grieve over our imperfect state, one other consolation is sent to us—but indeed it is the best of all. Our prayers, our praises, our alms, our sacrifices, our labours, our watchings, our fastings, go up to God in spite of all their imperfections, *because of Jesus Christ*. He makes them acceptable in Heaven; for though they rise from terrestrial bodies they pass through the way of His Body celestial, and God then looks not on our poor distorted features, but on the Face of His Anointed, the Glorious and Beloved SON.

And does not this bring us to, and begin for us, the true Divine remedies of which we spake? We

¹ "Holy Living," chap. i., sect. 2.

are commanded strictly *not* to sin—but “if,” after all, “any man sin, we have an Advocate with the FATHER, JESUS CHRIST the Righteous.”¹ And we cannot continue to be self-seekers, if we own; not only to God but to ourselves, that after we have done all, “we are unprofitable servants,” and that we must *cling to our Lord*, whatsoever we do, if we would indeed please God.

And with this acknowledgment we must remember next to *think of God*, as of Him Who is thoroughly acquainted with us, and Who will give us, not according to our fancied merits, but according to our ways in His sight. Look what follows the text: “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins.”²

And as you think of Him, *pray to Him*. It is here again: “Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for Thou art my Praise.”³ Or take the Psalmist’s petition: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.”⁴

And while you thus pray to Him, you will be in secret *with Him*: for we speak to God as to one who is very near us though we see Him not. Realize His Presence: and let your work and your adoration be as thorough when you are quite alone with

¹ 1 S. John ii. 1.

² Jer. xvii. 10.

³ Jer. xvii. 14.

⁴ Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

Him as when you are called to be with others : and then be sure He will not leave Himself without witness in your heart of hearts.

And finally, brethren, as His Presence thus goes with you, you will be prepared to *go to God by His own way*, rather than by paths of your choosing. It will indeed be the way of the Cross, but it is certain to be the way of peace, for it is the way of Him, Who, even as a man like one of us, is become exceeding glorious, and has His rest for ever, because He "pleased not Himself."¹

¹ Rom. xv. 3.

VII.

XX LONG-CONTINUED TEMPTATION.

S. JAMES I. 12.

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

IT sounds like a mere truism to speak of temptation as one of our trials; for temptation *means* trial. What does God do when He tempts us, as He tempted Abraham, but try us whether we will stand firm? What is it to be tempted of Satan, as Job was tempted by him, but to have a subtle enemy, trying our faith, our patience, our purity, our steadfastness, our love? Yet, after all, it is this simple thought which is so apt to be forgotten, and which would chiefly help us, under our LORD'S Cross, to endure. And since we must have greatly grown in grace ere we can "count it all joy when" we "fall into divers temptations,"¹ it can scarcely but be, that, in our present imperfect state, the yoke and burden of JESUS CHRIST should seem neither light nor easy, owing to the daily and hourly struggle, in which all true disciples are engaged, that they may

¹ S. James i. 2.

be proved of what sort they are. Therefore, on both accounts, that we may, on the one hand, realize our condition, and on the other, understand God's purpose for us, as to our conduct in the strife, our increase in strength, our Divine victory, and our final crown, it may be well for us to traverse yet again the well-trodden path, and to look more carefully at the familiar objects which meet our sight, some of them all the more dangerous, because they are so near and dear.

1. First, then, the very taking upon us of our Christian profession implies a warfare, and makes us liable to all its incidents—sudden attacks by night and by day—trials of temper, trials in eating and drinking, trials in matters of speech, trials through awful abasements and distresses, trials because of our lifting up, trials in the praise and blame of men, trials in our most hidden thoughts, trials as to the things which we believe and as to the things which we are commanded to do, trials of our courage, of our perseverance, of our sincerity, of our purpose in life. Had we never been made Christians, though we might have had sorrow upon sorrow, and difficulty after difficulty, none of these points which I have named need have troubled us as temptations, however much we might have felt some of them as tribulations. But the Baptismal Cross upon our foreheads is a type of that which truly goes through our whole being—the Cross of CHRIST, borne by us in its

bitter, bitter wholesomeness—carried forward with the certainty that it must bring upon us the deadly opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

2. For, next, as christened children we have a fellowship with the Crucified—a fellowship with Him not only in the blessed triumph over death, assured by Him to all believers—not only in our mystical union with Him as He sitteth even now upon the Throne—but also and primarily in this, that like Him, with Him, in Him, we have, every one of us, to resist unto blood, “striving against sin.”¹ It is wonderful to hear some people talk about their being Christians, some whose every endeavour is to find easy ways of serving God; some who do not know what it is to fight manfully against a besetting fault; some, to whom there is no terror in the prospect of failure: some, in whose life (so far as we may presume to read it,) there are scarcely any traces of the conflict with evil; some, who seem never to think of asking God to pardon them for yielding so soon to the tempter. Such persons have to learn one of the earliest lessons in the School of CHRIST. “My son! if thou come to serve the LORD, prepare thy soul for temptation.”² If the grace of Baptism is real, what more sure than that Satan, the *enemy* of grace, should at once send his messengers against it? How can he rest without assailing it himself? Upon JESUS, being baptized,

¹ Heb. xii. 4.

² Eccles. ii. 1.

the SPIRIT of God descended, and the Voice from Heaven bare witness to the Beloved SON ; but *then*, ("immediately," says S. Mark¹) He was "led up of the SPIRIT into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."² And the *members* of the Holy One must expect to be warred against in like manner, because of the envy of His foe. Have you ever watched the determined, wilful rebellion of a little child? How *could* it have such a power, while evidently knowing itself to be wrong? The mighty fallen angel was working against the undeveloped Gift of the HOLY GHOST. This very fact, indeed, seems to supply us with an answer to that anxious question which some of us, no doubt, often put to ourselves, as we think of the millions of children apparently very imperfect in character, who must stand hereafter before the Judgment-seat of CHRIST. As they were actually (praise be to God!) free from the grosser sins, so may we trust that their incompleteness in faith and life will not be imputed to them, because they had not yet been taught to realize and to use the imparted strength of the LORD. While the *other* fact, that there *was* some struggle, proves that temptation was experienced, and that they yielded to a great adversary. Train up a child in this revealed truth, that the enemy of CHRIST is the enemy of Christians, and that as "even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right,"³

¹ S. Mark i. 12.² S. Matth. iv. 1.³ Prov. xx. 11.

so he can only be happy by keeping, in spite of temptation, on the LORD's side, as having received in Holy Baptism a Gift, for the use and neglect of which he has to answer.

3. Where guidance has been thus careful, it is probable that, when childhood is past away, and the soul begins to understand that life is real and earnest, it will need no instructor to show the trial of temptation. For it is seen that we are in contact with the evil world, and yet that we cannot go out of the world, since God has given us our place and our duties therein; and yet again that we are tempted *in* our place and *amid* our duties; and yet, after all, that if we leave our place and seek another, we must encounter worse temptations with less strength, and that if we give up our present duties for the sake of obeying some fancied call, we shall not only be attacked but perplexed,—not only tempted, but tempted in darkness. And so we learn in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content. None the less must all who are willing to live godly in CHRIST JESUS feel that temptation, though they have His aid, is part of that fiery trial whereof the Apostle speaks. It is so real, this inclination to be proud, this desire to be first, this wish for notice and for praise, this lust of the flesh, this humour for foolish talking and for jesting on the things of God, this longing for revenge or for one rough word in return, this emulation of others, this forwardness to rebuke,

this backwardness to be advised, this habit of acknowledged indolence, this thought of putting God in the second place, this persistence in honouring self—it is all so very *real*: there is such a real battle to be waged against it, such real impossibility of stealing away from it, such real grief when we are overcome by it, the burden is so intolerable, really too heavy for us to bear.

4. And then, the *future*. We think of days and months more of loneliness, and of the perils of that lonely life; or of the many years of half-hearted society, with its constantly-recurring dangers; or of the long-continued ordeal of carnal appetites; or of the companionship, even to the end, of those who (we faithlessly imagine) can never be turned to the LORD; or of the personal conflicts which, judging from a sadly-lengthened experience, we must expect to have with the prince of the powers of the air,—and our soul melteth away because of the trouble. “I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.”¹ And though, by God’s mercy, we recover from such despairing fears as these, yet the way before us becomes a matter of very serious concern. There is the hope of glory, but it is a hope not seen, and the dangers are imminent, and the deep waters are round about us, and though we are rowing hard we cannot bring our vessel to the shore. The land seems so very far off; what if there should be another storm like that

¹ 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

which we remember as having been so awful, and hidden rocks without the warning bell which saved us a while ago?

5. And once more, though we are not altogether alone, but toiling in the Church, yet it is the militant Church to which we belong, and we are mingling in the tumult of her war. Our very fellowship with her involves us in her risks and perils. Her faith, her work, her mission, have many adversaries; and we cannot believe, or act, or go forth, without much opposition. We are united to "the People of God," and we *must* "suffer affliction with" them.¹ The fierceness, the flatteries, the deceits of the world are directed against our fellow-members and ourselves, to make us, if possible, flinch, or yield, or slumber; and we cannot stand aloof, if our Churchmanship is worth anything. We must all take part with her; it is but a little company compared with the multitude that is against us. And moreover, "the work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another."² And part of our host has already crossed the flood, and cannot visibly help us. And though we have some with us, they may not long be here; and some temptations will come when they cannot be by our side, and shall we be able to withstand in that evil day? Then, even as we ask the question, it is borne in upon us, that after all, whether there be many near us or but few, we must,

¹ Heb. xi. 25.

² Neh. iv. 19.

in the last resort, meet temptation *alone*: it is among the secret trials of our Christian life.

But then, (and here we turn to the sources of our comfort,) the secret power of temptation will drive us also to the secret "consolations of God."¹ I do not mean that we shall never seek His help through the outward ministrations of His appointed servants, for if we rejected them we should really be rejecting Him. But all true children of God know that there is a path whereon they may walk to Him themselves by themselves; and that spiritual way is reached oftentimes in a moment, by pouring out the heart before Him as the only Hope. Sudden temptations must be met by sudden remedies—the hand of a deceiver made powerless by the instant recollection of God; the voice of foolish enticement silenced by the Divine answer to an ejaculatory prayer; the perilous charm of a fair face absolutely deadened by the vision of the King in His perfect Beauty; the cup of drunkenness given up as loathsome in comparison to the proffered fulness of the HOLY SPIRIT; the word of anger kept down by one moment's gaze upon the forgiving, bleeding, agonized Son of Man. And then the prayer "without ceasing," to conquer the one continually active appetite, or the one lingering habit; and then the diversified petitions for the diverse temptations, and the supplications before the Altar against the deadly lust, from the guilt and

¹ Job xv. 11.

the power of which a SAVIOUR'S Blood alone can set us free.

And do we not learn next, and at that Holy Table most of all, the privilege of fellowship with CHRIST? Do we not learn what a high honour it is for us to have the opportunity of overcoming such temptations as He endured, "Who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin?" Surely it is as if we heard Him say, after some long protracted wrestling with our sins, "Ye are they which have continued with Me in *My* temptations."¹

And then in compassion to our infirmities, He shows us not merely Himself, the sinless Partaker of our flesh and blood, as our most encouraging Example, but also the blessed records of men once feeble as we are, who yet were strengthened to overcome the wicked one, and to keep themselves, whatever they were at first, at last unspotted from the world. That word of His becomes doubly precious to us when the lives of His saints are proved to be the lives which we might lead, and their victories the victories which may indeed be our own. For then we are taught to be pure with the purity of the tempted Joseph, and patient with the afflicted Patriarch, and steadfastly penitent as she was who was pardoned that she might sin no more, and temperate in all things like Daniel under the offer of a sumptuous fare, and faithful with the faithfulness of Noah,

¹ S. Luke xxii. 28.

though all the world should tempt us to apostasy, and poor, as Matthew was, with CHRIST, instead of clinging, as he might have done, to the gold that perisheth. O, brethren! "seeing that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses,"—witnesses to the might of faith against temptation,—“let us lay aside every weight,”¹ and follow them as they followed Jesus in the way of pain and of life. And is it not a help to us to bear in mind that these manifold temptations against which we must stand firm, last but for a season? On them, as on all the other sorrows of the Christian's course, the words are written, "A little while." Yes, God gives us in His Sacred Scriptures a yet more expressive term; for He tells us that our "light affliction is but for a moment."² How would the difficulties of twenty years' resistance to pride weigh, even in the point of time, against the eternal glory of the praise of God? How, even if you strove from youth to old age against the allurements to impurity, would this probation stand in comparison with the everlasting gladness of a heart made clean to behold its God?

And so, let us take to ourselves this further comfort,—the assurance that even if our temptation be life-long, it is not impossible to conquer it. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common

¹ Heb. xii. 1.

² The word is used by *Thucydides* (ii. 64), in the expression "momentary splendour."

to man, but God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."¹

What a joy for us, amid such promises as these, to be able to hold fast our integrity; to be able, if we fall, to rise and march again to meet the enemy; to be able to grow in grace, not by might, nor by power, but by the SPIRIT of the LORD, against all Satanic snares, keeping ever in our souls the benediction which forecasts the recompense: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the LORD hath promised to them that love Him."²

So loving Him Who gave Himself for us, we shall find our very temptations, indirectly, a source no longer of weakness, but of strength. Resisting to-day the impulse towards vanity, or lying, or uncleanness, we shall be twice as able to resist it to-morrow; for the temptation from without will be less, and the power within will be greater. Only, whatever be our place in life, whether it be the anxious one of poverty, or the more anxious one of a high estate, let our aim be ever this, to serve the LORD "with all humility of mind,"³ it may be, with many "tears," it must be amid manifold "temptations," yet it shall be (if we are but true, increasingly true, to

¹ 1 Cor. x. 13.

² S. James i. 12.

Acts xx. 19.

that lowly Christian purpose) with JESUS as our Helper, to deliver us out of all our fear. Then, "if God be for us, who can be against us?"¹ As yet the flames are exceeding hot, and we scarcely know how to abide under the sore trial which besets us. But God is proving us, and finding us worthy of Himself. Yes, and His Blessed Son is *with* us, by His own Presence and Grace, showing Himself our SAVIOUR, walking with us, lest we be consumed, in the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

¹ Rom. viii. 31.

VIII.

THE ATTRACTION OF THE WORLD.

GAL. VI. 14.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

THE Apostle has been speaking of certain false teachers who "escaped the scandal of the Cross at the hands of the Jews,"¹ by compelling their Christian converts to be circumcised. Thus they gloried in the flesh, and while professing the liberty of the SPIRIT, they really brought the disciples into bondage, making them, though Christians in name, indeed Jewish proselytes. In contrast to these S. Paul shows us the one only source of satisfaction, the one only thing wherein to glory, the one great centre of true Evangelical doctrine and true Evangelical life—the Cross of CHRIST. Thereby—by it and by Him Who died thereon—"the world," he says, "is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "The whole system of unspiritual and un-Christian men

¹ Alford *in loco*.

and things"¹ had lost its hold upon him. At his conversion and Baptism he had passed into a different sphere. Converted, he had found that there was a different sphere—baptized, he had entered it.² Gradually enlightened, called to be an Apostle, drawn on to the blessedness of constant suffering and of daily exertion with his LORD, he had learnt the immense practical value of that utter change—the peace and joy and hope of that death in life, that life in death.

By us also, my brethren and sisters in CHRIST, this wonderful union with Him, Who is "not of this world," this uplifting fellowship which has been bestowed upon our earthly selves with Him Who "is the LORD from Heaven," must be realised and exercised, if we too would have that wherein to glory, and whereby to be saved. Baptized as we were into

¹ Alford.

² Of course we are speaking of a grown-up person, who, before he could be baptized, needed turning, not indeed from fleshly sins, (for as touching the righteousness which was in the Law he was blameless,) but from unbelief in JESUS as the CHRIST. To argue that a child must not be baptized, because it cannot be converted, would logically lead us to say, that a child cannot be saved, because it cannot be converted: for it is to the kingdom of Heaven that lack of conversion is a bar. (S. Matth. xviii. 8.) But the LORD teaches us that conversion makes us *like* little children: and our Baptismal incorporation into the Church is, in all cases, a gift of GOD, granted on accepted conditions to the adult, on implied conditions to the infant.

the death of JESUS, living as we can be only said to live in Him Who liveth unto God, we are bound every day to look to it, that we "be not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of" our "mind,"¹ growing from our Divine birth into this higher state, up to the excellent strength and perfect beauty of the Christian life. The world must be crucified unto me, and I unto the world. This world with its boastfulness, its show, its fevered pulse, must be despised by me as a thing of nought and vanity and corruption, separated from my inner regard as completely as those who sleep are parted from the sight of the quick, hated as if it were the dead body of the impenitent thief, justly condemned by the side of the Holy One. And I must expect to be as the Crucified unto the world—set apart as having nothing to do with it—derided by it as one who had trusted in God and had trusted (so it seemed) in vain—loathed by it in my very companionship with CHRIST in His death, for "cursed is every one that hangeth upon a tree."² Thus spurned, thus rejected, I am verily "crucified with CHRIST: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but CHRIST liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me."³ Let him that glorieth glory in this!

Such is the noble ideal placed before us in the

¹ Rom. xii. 2.

² Gal. iii. 13.

³ Gal. ii. 20.

text, such the grand life, which has been actually attained by men of like passions with us, and at which we are exhorted to aim, because, whatever be our present character, we are all "*called* to be saints."¹ Yet the attraction of the world is so strong and so penetrating, the most of you would confess to a far lower rule, and a much less happy experience, even if you need not, with the rest, acknowledge that the world has gotten the dominion. Whether this dominion is really that of a slave-master, whether that experience is honestly that of a sincere though imperfect Christian, whether with all our professions we are living unto our LORD, whether, notwithstanding our deplorable self-indulgence, we do desire to share the mystery of His Passion, what is our secret yearning, which way we are seeking to walk in, whether, with "Jesus in the midst," we are on His Right Hand *or* on His Left,—are questions which can partly be solved by our answer to that one heart-searching inquiry, "Is the attraction of the world a *trial* to us, or not?"

1. Is it a trial to us to feel ourselves moved very often by the *love of society*—its pleasures, its fashions, its vanities? Our course lies up the stream, and we must work steadily to get home at last. Surely it must be of serious concern to have our strong arm paralysed now and then, so that we float downwards, easily and gently, but the wrong way—serious, to be

¹ Rom. i. 7.

caught in an eddy, and whirled round and round, till we lose our bearings—serious, to be snared by delusive voices and false lights on to the perilous sand-back—serious, after we have played away our time, to strike suddenly upon a hidden rock, with the darkness coming on—serious, to take foolish companions with us, ready, in their giddy thoughtlessness, to upset the vessel, and leave us drowning in the deep waters, far off from God. Does the figure seem unreal to us? let us leave it, and look at the life, whereof we speak, *as it is*. It is no small matter to find the narrow road running occasionally very close to the world's broad way, and because of our nearness, to be tempted to forsake even for one morning, and then for one morning more, the *habit* of prayer which we know to be for our very life; or to give up, because there are those standing by who will laugh at us for it, the *habit* of Scripture study, without which—if on *that* account we neglect it—we shall leave off being Christians. It is no small matter to have so much time taken away from religious exercises, to have a low standard of truth and of purity and of honour and of charity, to have our mind so excited by present pleasure, that God's Word appears dull to us, and a clergyman's presence unseasonable, and the Holy Communion impossible. But is it a small matter to *us*?

2. And again, is it trying or not to be aware of the motions of *ambition* within us—of our own per-

sonal craving for a place or a dignity higher than that which God seems to have appointed for us—of our frequent “longing for some great thing to do, or secret thing to know?” There is a subtle temptation which besets perhaps most of us, and which indeed, as it was among the evils renounced for us and by us all, must be considered in a manner common to every one—the pomp and glory of the world. And the very fact that we *have* renounced this—that we are, as Christians, pledged to resist it manfully, must make its pressure all the more awful to us. To feel that we are inclined to the “lust of the eyes,” instead of patiently regarding the “Invisible”—and that we think to be satiated with emptiness, instead of resting our souls on Him Who is Real and True—and that we have too much of the undue carefulness of Martha, instead of the quiet, obedient, attentive love of Mary—this surely, when we examine ourselves before God, must, if we wish to serve Him, be very grievous to us, part of that intolerable burden which we acknowledge, Sunday after Sunday, before Him, Who tells us that “one thing is needful,”¹ and that “the fashion of this world passeth away.”² O what a mistake it is, how untrue to Holy Writ and to human life, to say either that such anxiety is unnecessary for us if we have been joined to CHRIST, or that if we need such calls to the higher course we cannot be regenerate! Rather,

¹ S. Luke x. 42.² 1 Cor. vii. 31.

does not the SPIRIT say to us in that word, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. *For* ye are dead, and your life is hid with CHRIST in God."¹ Verily, all of us have to rise to the thought of what God has made us, and to walk strictly because of our privileges, and to remember that we are in peril, after all, of becoming devoted to the world, unless we do thus walk. If even "noble minds" have a "last infirmity," can we who are so imperfect, forget the bent of our own frail hearts, or fail to "pray without ceasing" for the power of keeping watch over ourselves? Knowing as we do, that we are "born of God" in order to "overcome the world,"² can we, (I speak as unto wise men,) be indifferent as to the tremendous attraction which the world still has for us?

3. And once more—there is another power in the army of this enemy of ours, to which we may not be sufficiently awake—the power of *covetousness*. I am not speaking of those who live for nothing else, and whose very God is mammon; but rather of those who name the Name of CHRIST in sincerity, and yet, though therefore loved by Him, as the young man of the Gospel was, are inclined to seek other treasure than that of Heaven—of such as we are, willing perhaps in all things to live honestly for God, yet tempted by our gold, our silver, or our pence, our large lands, or our little fields, to "mind earthly

¹ Col. iii. 2, 3.

² 1 S. John v. 4.

things.”¹ It is the canker in God’s most precious work, a Christian heart, which is so greatly to be dreaded—the shipwreck of a soul sailing heavenward, but too heavily laden to be thoroughly safe. Can any, whatever be his progress in godliness, count himself secure against this dangerous snare? can we forget a warning against apostasy through this, uttered even to a Bishop in the Church of God? “The love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, *they have erred from the faith*, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”² The poverty, the almsgiving, the self-denial of the Christian life, are not so easy to us that we are sure not to be forced, as it were, out of them, sure to abide in them in spite of temptation, sure, in these, to be free from distraction, and to hold fast our faith. Lack of contentment, over-carefulness, distrust as to the bread which we cast upon the waters, self-worship, self-seeking, of all this there is often but a small beginning—yet the end might be, even to one who is a Christian now, “destruction and perdition.”³ May we not say of this, as the poet says of another vice—

“It is the little rift within the lute,
That by-and-by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.

¹ Phil. iii. 19.

² 1 Tim. vi. 10.

³ 1 Tim. vi. 9.

The little rift within the lover's lute,
Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,
That rotting inward slowly moulders all."¹

Therefore "be not high-minded, but fear,"² re-collecting how one small point of the glittering surface, if it meets your eye, may dazzle you. To be dazzled would be to be off your guard—and then, what might you not suffer from your foe?

Surely, brethren, with such inclinations to keep down, such appetites in ourselves to combat, we ought to be able to understand that much is added to our difficulties by this weakness of our nature, this unwillingness which there is in us to yield to the dominion of CHRIST and of His Church, and to love ourselves last. But this is not all. Let it be impressed on all our hearts, that it is not enough for us to own that we are tried by this, but that we must also seek to conquer the trial! The attractive world must lose its attraction for us: what shall be our remedies?

1. First, surely—though this is no new thing—the *command* of God, "Love not the world."³ He does not say, "Have nothing to do with those who are not spiritual," nor yet, "Touch not, taste not, handle not the temporary enjoyments around you," nor yet, to most of us, "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor," nor yet, "Abide where thou art, even though bidden to go up higher," nor yet,

¹ Tennyson, "Vivien."

² Rom. xi. 20.

³ 1 S. John ii. 15.

"Come out of the world." But He saith, "Love it not,"—seek not its riches, its delights, its rewards, as if they were the true riches, the best delights, the everlasting reward—seek them not as if they were worth having for themselves—seek them not as if they were the object which could really satisfy a being made in the likeness of God. And this is *His* counsel to us, who knows not only our nature, but our true happiness, since He created us for Himself.

2. And with this plain command, we have (as we might have been sure from His mercy we should have,) also the *warning* of God, "If any man love the world, the love of the FATHER is not in him."¹ Nay more! as we are drawn into the vortex, and begin to share the principles and to imitate the habits of the children of this world, we alienate ourselves from God and deaden our souls and bodies to His blessed influence. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? *Who-soever* therefore will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God."² To those who consider this, there appears more and more a *repulsiveness* about a day full of pleasure, a position in which we receive nothing but praise, a life unchequered by loss of fortune. It looks so much as if the Good Physician with His bitter medicines and wholesome sharpness were absent from us, leaving us terribly alone. What trial could be worse than that?

¹ 1 S. John ii. 15.

² S. James iv. 4.

3. Thus charged, thus admonished, we are more ready to see that all things apart from God are not merely uncertain, but also perish as we use them. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof." Its brightness, as we reach it, fades; its fame is as the shadow that departeth; its riches make to themselves wings; there is no continuance, no means, in these, of satisfying the longings of an immortal soul; they are as the flower of the grass—we turn aside from our Christian tasks and meditations, to gather it, for its lovely colour or its delicious fragrance: but in a few hours it is withered and scentless, and its beauty, like our own poor human comeliness, is turned into corruption. Is *death* to be our teacher?

4. Yes, but there is *One* Death which teaches us the best of all. If we would have one countervailing force to overcome the attraction of the world, it must be the *stronger* attraction of JESUS CHRIST and of Him crucified. It is by Him—by that wondrous dying of His—by that mystery of His Death wrought into my heart and life, that I can have the world crucified unto me, and myself unto the world.

Apply this, I pray you, particularly to yourselves. In any given case, inquire honestly how this course would consist with the belief that you are dead unto sin and alive only unto God. How should I act at this moment, if I thought of Him "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might *deliver* us from this

present evil world?"¹ Realize more and more your vital union with that SAVIOUR, and you will learn that it is a fellowship which is meant not only to bring you pardon, but to keep you from the evil. And knowing this, think not too surely that you stand, but take heed lest you fall. Not even the companionship of a saint will hold you up, unless within yourself you are cherishing the might of the SPIRIT against the enemies around—not merely greeting others as with the greeting of a Churchman, but ever ready to share the reproaches, the necessities, the imprisonments of the faithful members of the Church. You have not forgotten that short sad history: "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world."² Nay more! not even the glorious Presence of JESUS CHRIST Himself will be your certain Refuge and Defence, except your heart be right with His Heart, your life bound up with His Life, your privations and distresses borne continually in dependence upon Him, Whose distresses and privations were at last summed up in the Sacrifice of Himself. Otherwise, to be near Him in body, while in spirit cleaving to the world, would be but to increase your damnation. What fall more terrible than the fall of Judas, "one of the twelve?" But if with a believing loving soul we walk beside our LORD, the drawings from without will be weaker and weaker, the constrainings from within increasing

¹ Gal. i. 4.² 2 Tim. iv. 10.

in strength each day ; for "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."¹ And though to be crucified with CHRIST, for our full triumph in Him, is indeed to pass through the stages of a lingering and painful death, yet it will be in the thorough consciousness of the living soul within us, and more, of the Quickening SPIRIT who shall raise hereafter even these mortified bodies in which He dwelleth now—and it will be with the sure and certain hope, that though for His sake we are "killed all the day long," yet "neither death nor life" (neither a death of suffering like S. Stephen's, nor a life of martyrdom like S. John's,) . . . "shall be able to separate us from the Love of God which is in CHRIST JESUS our LORD."²

¹ 1 S. John v. 4.

² Rom. viii. 35—39.

IX.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF HUMILITY.

PHIL. II. 3.

"In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

THESE words, though really giving us a charge from God, must often have suggested to us the difficulty of that virtue which they commend, and set us upon asking how we could possibly attain unto it. And even to an earnest Christian the difficulty is no slight one. It was to pride that the greatness of the very angels drew them down, and the best of us men cannot expect to be free from it.¹ Nay! the higher we climb, the worse in one sense becomes our danger, from dizzy head and beating heart, and hands and feet grown careless in our consciousness of security. Yes, and when we realize the peril, how much it presses upon us! Our very withdrawal from the world, our distrust of its earthly level and its miserable aims and interests, may tend to self-exaltation, as we begin to breathe the purer air; and it is no small trial to one who is mounting upward to find

¹ 1 Tim. iii. 6.

himself, while endeavouring to live above the common standard of truth and morality, and apart from the lowering influence of pleasure and ambition, inclined, even on that account, to think highly of himself, and to claim as his own a holiness greater than that of his fellows. That there should be this tendency we can easily understand: the reason is not far to seek. When men and women have been, by God's mercy, lifted up either from sensual sins or from worldly attractions, the great enemy of us all, fearing to lose them altogether, and seeing that he cannot win them as he wins the most, tries to bring them into destruction by the same snare which ruined himself, and to make the position which should have been for their spiritual wealth an occasion of their fall. But I speak to some who are "not ignorant of his devices,"¹ and who yet own that it is a hard fight with them, day after day, to grapple with him in this crafty assault of his.

1. For, first, the knowledge of God, even as it is revealed to us below, is so glorious and so elevating, that we are soon inclined to despise those who, as we think, have it not. He who has learnt, especially after a long course in sinful ways, to believe in CHRIST as his own personal JESUS, to regard the Almighty God as his own loving FATHER, to discern in himself the working of the HOLY GHOST as of his own Comforter and Guide, is very apt at once to con-

¹ 2 Cor. ii. 11.

sider himself as differing altogether from all those in whom he sees as yet no such individual faith in this Divine Being, though all the while, unnoticed by him, there may be the secret upspringing of the seed of God, the growing influence of the truly imparted SAVIOUR, the gradually forthcoming manifestation of that HOLY SPIRIT, whom for life or for condemnation they did all at their Baptism receive. We behold not this, and we are tempted to disbelieve in its existence, and therefore to account ourselves, as if in jealousy for God's honour, full of faith, while those others are void of it. And when a man thinks himself, and rightly thinks himself, enlightened, it is so easy to be contemptuous, so easy to reckon others in darkness, so easy to fancy that they are in all peril, while he is in none, so difficult to remember that "he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know,"¹ and that his own faith is but in its earlier stages when it should be, after his nearness to the Author and Finisher thereof, complete and fruitful.

2. And as of saving faith, so of sanctifying grace. This too is a possession, which, strange as it may seem, may be fraught with jeopardy to those who have it. God forbid, indeed, that we should think of it for a moment as otherwise than a priceless gift of our LORD, since it is one chief bestowal of His own most HOLY SPIRIT! Yet, though we should covet it earnestly, we ought never to forget that there is

¹ 1 Cor. viii. 2.

a special element of it which we might miss—that charity, which “vaunteth not itself,” and “is not puffed up,”¹ and which bids us, *because* we are being made holy, bring nothing disdainful into our character, since there is nothing of disdain in the Mind of the Perfect God. Yet, O how hard this is! How prone we are, as having been endued with power celestial, to act as if we were saying to our graceless neighbour, “Stand by thyself, I am holier than thou;”² or at least to look down upon him as one beneath us, instead of striving to raise his thoughts and desires far above ourselves, and to fix them where we would fain fix our own, on the Giver of all good, without Whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy!

3. And if grace granted has a tendency to spiritual pride, does not Satan take care to make of grace exercised a still more subtle temptation? For in *that* case it is God’s gift which makes us in a manner satisfied with ourselves; but in *this*, it is our own use of privileges which the enemy would pervert and which he does so easily pervert into a ground of self-confidence, as if we had indeed done anything as of ourselves, as if we had moved forward or upward in our unaided strength, when all the while our sufficiency had been of God.³ We look back upon the solemn season of the laying on of hands, and trust

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

² Isa. lxxv. 5.

³ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

that we have been enabled to stir up that gift of God which was then conveyed to us, and it is well. But we watch, almost in spite of ourselves, the track of a companion who knelt beside us for that sacred rite, and we can hardly help noticing how careless he has been, how indifferent to the study of the Scriptures in which we have found comfort, how unmindful of the might of the LORD in which we are seeking to be strong, how negligent as to that Holy Communion, wherein our SAVIOUR helped us by His Presence. Or we think of that Communion itself, and of other worshippers who drew nigh with us ; and there appears in some of them a want of earnestness, a want of thoroughness, a want of practical devotion in common every-day life, to Him of Whom they had partaken : and though we cannot say much of our own progress, we fancy theirs is much less, and, almost insensibly, we place ourselves among the saints and leave them with the sinners.

4. How much more, my friends, while there is in those around us, not merely a neglect of grace, but the actual commission of many evil deeds ! We see others going on in some terrible habit, and the line which separates us from the Pharisee of the Parable becomes very dim. Surely, "not as other men are," are we ! Yet I do not mean of course that any sincere Christian would willingly act in the spirit of that hateful character, which is rather described by our LORD, in order to warn those who trust in them-

selves that they are righteous, and despise others;¹ but only that it is so *difficult* for us, even when we wish to give God the glory, to keep from that comparison of ourselves with others, which S. Paul tells us is "not wise."² Our poor human nature, even when it is going up on the chariot of fire, is so weak and vain, that it is apt to forget the immeasurable height above, and to look with complaisance on the earth beneath. And certainly when we do seem free from grosser sins, and observe others openly offending, it needs much exercising of ourselves in the humiliating lesson of our unworthiness before God, to keep us from the proud and perilous thought of our stainless honour, our unbroken soberness, our steadfast purity. Surely we must walk very circumspectly, even in the higher atmosphere of the narrow way. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."³ It is dangerous sometimes even to look down, instead of pressing forward; it is better to keep our eyes intent upon the goal, than to let them roam to mark how far some are behind us in the race. There is the same chance for us all; say rather, the same beautiful crown to encourage every *one*, even the most backward runner. Never be so high-minded as to imagine that you are safe and he has no hope of the prize. And if that is difficult, recollect that there is a greater difficulty still; for

¹ S. Luke xviii. 9.

² 2 Cor. x. 12.

³ 1 Cor. x. 12.

the Apostle tells us that each is to esteem other *better* than himself. Is it indeed so? are we to think those *higher* than ourselves, who have less knowledge, less grace, less self-improvement, less power over sin, less love for God, less charity towards men? This does seem against the grain, even to a Christian. Humility such as this, is something too high and excellent for us. Yet remember, I pray you, that every grace of the SPIRIT, every mark of His Presence, is to be sought for by all who name the Name of CHRIST, and that every difficulty can be mastered for us by Him to Whom nothing is impossible. How then can we fulfil this precept of perfection?

(1.) Let us remember, how great have been our advantages, and how little we have profited by them: and on the other hand, how many disadvantages others have had, and how little they are behind us after all. What should we have become, had we been in their dangerous position? Where would they be now, had they been as highly favoured as ourselves? Assuredly there is in them the seed of a nobler plant than that which has risen from our hearts.

(2.) And so, next, as you survey the lives and characters of others and contrast them with your own, try to find out the good that is in them, the evil in yourself; for that good thing may be increased by God's assisting grace into a bounteous harvest of

holiness; and this evil must be rooted out of your soul, or it may be, if long indulged in, your destruction. Then, which would be the saint, in whom the LORD would be admired? and which ought you to honour now?

(3.) But again, even taking things as they are, and granting that you are more advanced in Christian knowledge and in holy living, whose work is this? "What hast thou that thou didst not *receive*?"¹ Apart from God, what *are* we? The more there is of His SPIRIT in us, the less should we think of ourselves, counting ourselves in very deed less than the least of His mercies.

(4.) Nay, but letting comparisons alone, what think you of our actual state as it is seen of God? How would it endure the searching light of His countenance, those glorious Eyes which are too pure to behold iniquity? We retain no comeliness under that gaze—what seemed so fair is turned in us into corruption—the thoughts, and words, and deeds of every day are discovered, to our shame, to be full of sin. We no longer consider the faults of others, for our own are now a sore burden, too heavy for us to bear. It is from the gates of death that we are lifted up by our forgiving LORD.

(5.) And further, so far from our high estate in CHRIST giving us any opportunity for self-esteem, the Divine exhortation rather enjoins upon us, because of

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

our vocation, to abase ourselves, to "put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved," this "humbleness of mind."¹ Verily, this is the necessary posture for all those who would enter through that lowly door into the glorious kingdom of the contrite.

(6.) And who (let us reverently ask) is that lowly door, through which all must come to the FATHER? None but He who says to us, "Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart."² O, whenever we hesitate, whenever it seems beyond us, to be humble towards all, let our thoughts return to JESUS CHRIST, "Who, being in the Form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant,"³ dwelling among us "as he that serveth,"⁴ serving us by His sorrow-laden self-denying Life, and by the unutterable Humiliation of His shameful Death. In the light of that most marvellous Example, in the remembrance of the LORD of Glory crucified between two thieves, we learn what it is to overcome the difficulties of humility. Then it is as if we heard Him saying to us from His very cross, "The greater thou art, the more humble thyself, so shalt thou learn of Me." Lofty buildings must have deep foundations; indeed, we must go down very deep till we reach the Rock which is CHRIST, and then we shall be able to raise in our mortified lives a memorial

¹ Col. iii. 12.

² S. Matth. ix. 29.

³ Phil. ii. 5—7.

⁴ S. Luke xxii. 27.

of His Passion, in a way which we could not have conceived of, except through what He has done. The tree which is to stretch far and wide, whose leaves are fair, and the fruit thereof much, and whose top is to reach at last unto heaven, must strike its roots into the earth, where it is secretly held of God, and nourished by His Goodness: else must it even be hewn down, as it lifts up itself in all its goodly height and beauty, though envied by "all the trees of Eden, that are in the garden of God."¹ For it is the *humble* person whom He will save and sanctify and justify, for the sake of His Righteous Son, Who, even in His Human Nature, has been highly exalted, and Whose Name is above every name, because He so wonderfully "humbled Himself."² Think of the glory which He left for *you*, and of the glory to which He has been restored, in the everlasting Beauty of His Godhead, with the added brightness of His perfected and transfigured Manhood, and then, at whatever sacrifice, "let this mind be in you, which was also in CHRIST JESUS."

¹ Dan. iv., cf. Ezek. xxxi.

² Phil. ii. 9.

X.

THE SNARE OF SPECIAL TALENTS.

1 COR. XII. 31.

"Covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet show I unto you a more excellent way."

MOST of us can do some one thing well. That one power is a talent of God; for "every perfect gift is from above."¹ To the Corinthians, indeed, the Apostle is speaking, throughout, of spiritual bestowals, when he tells them of the marvellous diversity of the gifts of the HOLY GHOST, and bids them earnestly desire these. Yet, when we remember not only, in particular, the remarkable instance of Bezaleel and Aholiab,² but also the general truth, that the SPIRIT of God is actually the Giver of life and therefore of all its manifold endowments, we

¹ S. James i. 17.

² "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship."—Exod. xxxi. 1—6; xxxv. 30.

shall see how thoroughly we owe to Him the faculties of our minds and bodies. And so, as in God "we live and move and have our being,"¹ from Him we derive all we have and all we are, everything which separates us from the beasts that perish, and every peculiarity which makes us different from other men. The strong right hand, what is it but a grant of the Almighty? The delicate appreciation of Divine music, what is it but the very property of Him which formed the ear? That bold and tender pencilling, which can portray, by a few strokes upon the canvas, the brightest colour and the deepest shadow, whence comes it, but from "the FATHER of lights," around Whose Throne are the clouds of darkness? That observant and thoughtful genius, which can draw from the silent rocks a speaking testimony to God, or from the solitary bone of a dead creature, the beautiful forms and orders of the LORD's creative will, or from the place and shape of a little shell, the old courses and currents of its native sea, is not this the reflex, imparted by Himself, of Him Who alone can thoroughly comprehend what none but Himself has made? But then all His gifts imply, not merely the obligation to use them, but also the bounden duty of acknowledging and serving the Giver: and it is just here that so many are found, in each generation, lacking. For unhappily we read of a Saul as well as of a David, of an Ananias as well as of a

¹ Acts xvii. 28.

Barnabas, of a Judas as well as of a Peter. Prophetic inspiration is as thoroughly bound up with the hopeless fall of Balaam as with the absolute self-devotion of Ezekiel. The wisdom of Solomon intensifies his gross impurity as much as does the natural ignorance of the Apostles the heart-convincing eloquence of their doctrine. If, on the one hand, we are moved by the diligent, scrupulous obedience of the heaven-sent Elijah, how much are we saddened and admonished by the personal heedlessness of the heaven-sent Jehu! If the learning of Moses has been a blessing to "all the Israel of God," was not the learning of the scribes the cause, even to the chosen people, of their accursed sin of crucifying their LORD? If true science has ever been for those who rightly follow it the handmaid of religion, how many of those who profess "science falsely so called"¹ "have erred concerning the faith!" If vigour of limb has many times sustained and quickened laborious workers for God in higher things, how often also has it led men to forget the present necessity of the immortal soul, and the future helplessness so soon to come even upon the mortal flesh! What would it be to be so absorbed in our own abilities as to be unable to discern the signs of that judgment which shall be "upon every one that is lifted up"²—or to be so intent on the pursuit of knowledge, so filled with the conceit of our own inventions, as to

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 20.² Isa. ii. 12.

count the preaching of the Cross but foolishness, and the imitation of the Crucified quite unworthy of us? Surely as a *little* knowledge is a dangerous thing, so are we fearfully responsible for *all* that we can discover, for *all* that we can do. Therefore it is, that both a hidden talent and a perverted gift are shown to be so perilous to us. Therefore it is, that though both riches and honour come of God, though it is in His Hand to give strength, though wisdom is a peculiar outpouring—one of the very best manifestations—of His HOLY SPIRIT, He yet declares to us by His prophet: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me."¹

But we are examining in these pages the probation of the Christian life; and so here we have to speak, not so much of those who are blindly or wilfully bowing down to their nets, as of those who, being sincere disciples, feel themselves again and again in jeopardy through the undue exaltation of powers entrusted to them. This might become a snare to us; and our trial lies in the duty and the difficulty of discriminating between the rightful exercise and the hazardous abuse of the bent of our nature and of the gifts of God. This trial—much hidden as it is even from the eyes of our nearest and dearest friends—we will briefly consider to-day.

¹ Jer. ix. 23, 24.

A Christian knows what it is to have a ruling passion. He knows what the tendency of this passion is. He knows whither the inclination of his own peculiar character will lead him, even after the repentance of yesterday, and the prayers of this morning. He knows that ready wit may make him profane towards the Holy Scriptures—and a melodious voice, self-conscious in the courts of the Lord—and eloquence, more eager for triumph than for truth—and painting, forgetful, through human loveliness, of the perfect Beauty of our God—and the study of the stars, too little desirous of Him Whose “mercy is greater than the Heavens”—and the love of books, unmindful of a sick man or a suffering child—and poetry, impatient of the stern and awful realities of human life—and architecture, indifferent to the needful preparation for that “building of God, the House not made with hands”—and the clever management of the farm or the merchandise, the small piece of ground or the broad acres of land, too liable to make excuses about the interests of the eternal world—and the pleasures of society, careless about that solemn hour when we must be, every one of us, alone.

It is so, in very truth. What we call our strong points will become the source of our most alarming weakness, if they are not tempered and sanctified by the increasing humility and ever-active faith, which are among the chief characteristics of a Christian. Such a one is constantly asking himself, as in God’s

Presence, "What hast thou which thou hast not received?" Such a one feels, that since he *has* received every faculty and every grace, all these must be acknowledged, exercised, kept in their proper place, so used as to be given back hereafter to Him Who gave them. They are *lent* jewels, and must be worn as not our own, carefully preserved, kept always bright, so set upon our heart here that hereafter they may shine for God in the golden crowns which we shall cast down before His Throne. In that sense, these "best gifts" are, after all, to be much desired by us; but only that we may dedicate ourselves the more, through them, to God, in perfect love. And this brings us to a few practical thoughts which may, some day, be useful to us, though we shall not all value them now.

1. First, whatever be your power, of mind, body, or estate, *consecrate* it to God. I do not simply mean, pray about it—though that is indeed most necessary with regard to all such things. Rather let us learn to devote the power itself to Him: that it may be like the firstfruit of that increase wherewith He hath visited us. Was it not in this way that the ancient artists of the Church impressed such a character upon their grand conceptions that we of these days are the better for beholding them? Why do we take such a delight in, yes, find ourselves lifted up by, the repeated contemplation of the works of Fra Angelico or of Leonardo da

Vinci?¹ Because such men must surely have laboured for the LORD. Or why even in our own time has the memory of one of our most exquisite singers such a charm about it still? Because her custom was, in accordance with the counsel of her spiritual adviser, every morning first to sing to God. Or why, in these royal arms of ours, is the *harp* of Ireland quartered in the Cross? Surely, as a touching memorial of that union between poetry and faith, in which the heathen bards of Erin received the Gospel from S. Patrick. For "when once blessed and transformed, says an old author, the songs of the bards became so sweet that the angels of God leant down from Heaven to listen to them."² Whether this be legend or history, it has a real teaching for us: for it bids us, as do the examples of the Saints of old, make an offering to the Great King, of the very best we have in the treasury which He has filled.³ Or let us go back to the safest rule of all—the rule of Holy Writ: "All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given

¹ "To Angelico the art of painting a picture devoted to religious purposes was an act of religion, for which he prepared himself by fasting and prayer."—Jameson.

² "Monks of the West," vol. ii., p. 392.

³ When George Herbert sent to his mother the verses beginning "My God, where is that ancient heat toward Thee," he said, "My meaning is in these sonnets, to declare my resolution to be, that my poor abilities in poetry shall be all and ever consecrated to God's glory."

Thee.”¹ Here is the principle, not only of tithes and offerings, but of those loving sacrifices which Christians learn to make of their very self as endowed by Him.

2. And then, because of this sacred tribute, and to show our sincerity therein, we shall try to *improve* each gift. For, as we are to present ourselves from time to time, as labouring for God, (the visible altar constantly calling us to this very thing,) so is it our bounden duty to add, by His furthering help, to the graces and powers with which He has mercifully blest us. The remembrance of His return to reckon with us all should be quite sufficient to insure our conscientious diligence. For His word, as we know so well, is the same to every one among us: “Occupy till I come.”² Till I come, make good use of this, for it is Mine—not to be buried, not to be hidden away, but to do a work in your heart and life. Just because it is your Lord’s, be very earnest with it. He gives us a very short time for its exercise, and so we must be instant therein. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”³ Our probation, our time for labour and self-improvement and for advancing in truth, our golden opportunities, are here. When He comes to take account, it will be too late;

¹ 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

² S. Luke xix. 13.

³ Eccles. ix. 10.

and whether that coming be far or near, death puts us into a state of expectation, fearful it may be or it may be hopeful—but with no other chance of doing in the body the service and will of God. This is the last time—there must be no delay, no weariness, no lack of care, about one precious talent.

3. But this reminds us next, that these powers of which we speak must be used only in proper proportions with each other. Our LORD delivers to us, indeed, according to our several ability ; and though the five talents of the first servant are more than the two talents of the second, for that very reason must he exert himself the more, to leave none of the five unimproved. And as the one neglected talent of the third is brought forth to his condemnation, so, on the positive side, we have in each case the thorough employment of every portion of the sum, to remind us, among the thousand lessons of the Parable, that it would imperil our souls to reckon as of no importance any one of the heavenly trusts. Even Christian people need this warning : for is it not a common thing with all of us to give up almost all our time and energies to some particular occupation for which we have, as we say, a gift—and to set aside, because more difficult, those duties which God has empowered us to master, only with more care and pains ? Rather let us be ready to lay aside the one for a while, (at the call of Him Who charged us with it,) in order that we may be able more heartily

and industriously to take up others, each in its time and place. And especially, in estimating the relative importance of various duties, recollect that those talents which require the labour of head or of hand must be subservient generally to more purely spiritual endowments, needing the close attention of the soul. For the gifts of grace are infinitely better than the highest attainments of knowledge, the greatest accomplishments in art, or the widest developments of strength or of skill—ininitely better and therefore, out of all proportion, necessary for us to be exercised therein. "He that lacketh these things is blind" indeed,¹ however keen his eye, however penetrating his intellect, however wide his range over the fields of thought. These therefore first, but afterwards the rest: for all our powers must together serve the LORD; and He does not count indolent students or careless observers His best followers, even though they be constantly willing to pray and ready with their alms. I should strive, says the Christian in his daily hymn,

*"That all my powers, with all their might,
In Thy sole glory may unite."*

4. And once more, do not forget, even if you have five talents, that other two are with your fellow-servant. It may be that he has as yet only traded with the one, and that while the science which he loved from boyhood has been growing in him more

¹ 2 S. Pet. i. 9.

and more, the blessed faculty of prayer which he had gained as a child has fallen into disuse in later and more dangerous days. Pray that he may abound in this grace also, and recognise the other as of God. Respect the gifts of those around you; so shall you grow, almost without being aware of it, in one of the greatest of all gifts. For if you think overmuch of your own strength, very soon you may utterly fall; but the lowliness of charity will support you even when you are most weak. "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity buildeth up."¹ "Faith," even, "if it hath not works, is dead,"² but Christian charity is faith working by love. Charity is a more excellent way even than the best gifts, even than the fulness of prophetic power, or the comprehension of all mysteries. Charity makes a man forget himself, and all his honours, and all his growth in grace, in the glad and generous regard for the slow and toilsome progress of those less highly favoured. When, twelve hundred years ago, in what we call the dark ages, Ermenfried the German, the high-born, king-nurtured, thoroughly-learned son of the conquerors of Rome, became a priest, he distributed the Body of the Lord to the communicants, and "when he perceived the hard hands of the ploughmen, he bent down to kiss with tender respect these noble marks of the week's labour."³

¹ 1 Cor. viii. 1.

² S. James ii. 17.

³ The story is graphically told by M. de Montalembert, in his "Monks of the West," vol. ii. p. 487.

Behold the victory of Christianity over the heathen world! What a lesson for ourselves if we would learn to overcome! May we too gain, by honouring the growth of others, whose gifts are fewer than our own, that spirit of self-abasement which testifies, so surely though so secretly, our increasing nearness to God.

5. And lastly, while you thus advance, in diligence and charity, day after day, be intent above all on that priceless benefit of God—the revelation of “His unspeakable gift”—the unwavering belief in His Everlasting Son. Count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of CHRIST JESUS our LORD. Pray that no researches may take you from Him—that no clouds may hinder you from following after Him—that none of the lesser lights may satisfy you for a moment instead of Him—that however far other discoveries may be, however long you may find the way to the distant realms of science, *He* may dwell in your heart: that so, if He will, He may gladden you with the joy of faith, and if He will, may unfold to you the deep things of the higher wisdom; but that whatever else He may do for you here, you may at least so learn of Him, in the perfection of His example, and the abundance of His grace, that you may be “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by JESUS CHRIST, to the glory and praise of God.”

XI.

PRAISE AMID SINFULNESS.

S. LUKE XVI. 15.

"That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

IF humility is beset with difficulties owing to the natural pride of our own heart, and to the spiritual pride wherewith Satan tries to puff us up, is there not a further hindrance in our way, in the undue measure of approval which those around are apt to bestow upon us—approval accorded to us not only for our exercise of intellectual gifts, but also for our apparent progress in the faith and grace of the Christian life?

These words indeed of our LORD which stand at the head of our meditation were intended primarily for those who, being really covetous and selfish, sought to justify themselves before men, and made human notice and human praise the aim and object of their hypocritical religion. But the humble servant of CHRIST takes this warning home to himself as a solemn truth, and remembering it, feels how little he

merits the esteem of others, and how very little, in numberless instances, that esteem reflects the love of the heart-searching God. To such a one, this becomes one of the tests of his character, a severe trial in his life: he cannot forget that the SAVIOUR's stern rebuke becomes an admonition to him.

1. For, first, he knows how constantly mixed motives keep creeping in: how, amid sincere desires to please God, the regard of men is thought of again and again; how charitable deeds, reverent gestures, earnest words, sober habits, acts of worship, and even of humility are often marred—so conscience says—by a secret yearning for the commendation, or at all events the encouragement, of his fellows; how hard it is to follow a straightforward line, and to do a thing at the simple bidding of the HOLY GHOST, without reference to the likes or dislikes of our friends or neighbours; how easy to persuade oneself that one has been working steadily for the glory of God, when all along there had been a wish, not perhaps for the notice of many, but at least for the honour to be expected from a few; how much inclined he is to tell out some experience of his own, some token of special favour from on high, instead of cherishing it in his heart, and thanking God for it in some place apart from others. So indeed it is with many, perhaps with most of those whose general purpose and endeavour is to devote themselves to the service of the One Divine Master, but who find themselves day

after day turned away from singleness of eye and heart, by some by-end, some flattering voice, some echo from the earthly hills, where the sound of their doings is gone forth, some figure which distracts them from the intentness of their heavenward gaze. Does not the Christian *feel* this, as he thinks of the Home beyond, and recollects that whatever he does in his journey thither, he is to "do all to the glory of God."¹

2. Surely he does, and the more so, because he knows how readily he *accepts* human praise, and how often he is, in a manner, satisfied with it—satisfied with it, till it is borne in upon him, that the standard of excellence with men is not only far lower than the all-wise judgment of God, but is even, many a time, utterly at variance therewith. Before we remember this, is it not quite a common thing with us to imagine, that because we are commended of men, therefore all is well, as if there were no danger of deceitfulness, no danger of self-satisfaction, no danger of resting on the place to which God's grace has brought us, when we ought to be pressing on unto perfection? O, it is so easy to take credit to ourselves for that which is *not* of ourselves, to give up patient exertion when we have climbed some part of the way, to look back on those things which are behind, instead of reaching forth unto the things which are before—so easy and so perilous! We know it,

¹ 1 Cor. x. 31.

when we are true to our better instincts, and can enter, heart and soul, into the poet's meaning when he cries :

"Be silent, Praise,
Blind guide with siren voice, and blinding all
That hear thy call."¹

8. For, next, is there not this special pang in the trial of being so regarded, that the Christian is bitterly conscious how little he deserves such high esteem? Did he take it to himself as his due, it would indeed be not merely a *proof*, but a cause of blindness—a proof of the present film upon his eyes—a cause of his being covered with a thicker darkness, till he should not even know in which direction to seek for "the true Light which lighteth every man."² But so far from his acting thus, when he is honest with himself, and has a watch of his own set within, he confesses how utterly the picture fails to represent the life, how little it portrays the mind, how much it idealizes the expression, how unfairly it softens down the harsher lines and shadows, how colourably it gives the outward appearance, how far off it is from the heart. Help me, any one of you, to describe the difference: was there not pride, where men thought there was lowliness, wandering desire where we seemed to them so attentively reverent,

¹ "Christian Year," (Wednesday before Easter.)

² S. John i. 9.

self-seeking under the mask of charity, stubborn endurance when we were counted faithful bearers of the cross, lasciviousness, though those nearest to us would have it that we were patterns of purity? O, you who are in earnest, though so full of imperfections, so grievously stained (as you owned even now) with sin, is it not a real source of trouble and anxiety to find yourselves thought much of because you have done some little thing for CHRIST, and to be praised by better men than yourselves, when even your own heart is condemning you not only for the forsaken habits of the past, but for many, present, shameful falls? How much we are supposed to have, I do not say of grace, but of the diligent exercise of grace, though all the while we are bewailing our frequent negligences! How free we are supposed to be from the sins of others, when these, alas! are our very own—the deeply felt, oft-repent-ed, still-clinging evils which make the question of our life to Godward so awfully serious even now!

4. But the praise *will* come, and the Christian, as he is praised, trembles at the thought of God's all-discerning vision. Were he the highest among the saints, what would he be in *His* sight, Who chargeth even His angels with folly, and before Whom the purest of the pure must veil their faces, afraid to look upon God? And what then shall he say who owns himself, with the passionate sincerity of an Apostle, and out of a far deeper depth of sin,

the chief of sinners,¹ so richly endowed with grace, so careless in the use of it, so long, so mercifully, so wonderfully spared, so little fruitful after all, so lovingly and loudly and decidedly warned, yet withal so deaf, so wilful, so rebellious? Assuredly such sinfulness, (and is not this what ours has been?) does bring out in more glaring contrast the short-sighted fancies of men with regard to what they call our merits: and the remembrance of it does drive us, if we are truly penitent at last, to that which is the only thing we can plead before the LORD most Holy—the worthiness of His SON. Blessed shall we be if we do thus take refuge from ourselves. For then, though we must still wait for the day which shall try every man's work of what sort it is, we shall wait for it in the quietness and the confidence of those who are at rest in CHRIST, and so find no labour toilsome for His sake—of those who, because they so thoroughly belong to Him, strive to be like Him,—and to purify themselves even as He is pure.

Whether this spirit, this expectation, is indeed ours, or whether we are, in reality, still in jeopardy through this portion of the Christian's probation, we shall be able in some measure to ascertain by some such considerations as the following:—

(1.) Do we love the praise of men *more* than the praise of God? Do we seek it for ourselves? It is the seeking of it which is so dangerous to the hidden

¹ 1 Tim. i. 15.

life, so poisonous to our Christian faith. You have not forgotten our SAVIOUR's inquiry, "How *can* ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?"¹ But if not, if amid the sounding waves of this troublesome world, our souls are ever listening for the one Voice of Him Who is our Great Reward, if when the reflecting mirrors give back our own poor likeness to us on this side and on that, we rather fix our eyes on the glorious Beauty of our returning King, then we need not fear lest we are being ensnared and overcome.

(2.) And there will also be this comfort for us,—that the intended hindrance will be rather a help to us, if, when we are exalted by others, we abase ourselves in secret all the more : in secret, for we should not always be disclaiming praise among men, lest our real humility be lost. For humility is a grace which shrinks from observation, and thereby does its work, strange as it may seem, upon the world—a grace which takes us into the secret chamber and the Blessed Presence where we can fearlessly and with burning tears confess our great unworthiness, and so go back to our place with the evident marks of the LORD JESUS, and the speaking silence of His lowly Cross.

(3.) And then, if we are thus learning of Him, there will be this further sign of our sincerity in the

¹ S. John v. 44.

sight of God, we shall be stirred up to be less unworthy of that estimation, which in man indeed is often mistaken, but which does at least faintly remind us that whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, yea! "if there be any virtue and if there be any praise," we are to "think of these," for the Lord's sake, since He has made them so.¹ If one should tell you he is sure you must be a diligent student of Holy Writ, say to him what you can by way of humbling yourself, but also bear in your heart the actual excellence of that Christian habit, and for the little space still remaining, search those Scriptures which hitherto you have in truth neglected. If men should praise you for a kindness and a charity greater than you possess, ask God to forgive you what is lacking now, and to fill you with that love which is, when we really work it out with the sacrifice of self, "the bond of perfectness."² So shall the words of those who are with you on the steep hill-side prove in truth the echo of His utterance Who is calling you upwards, by bidding you "add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity."³

(4.) And if it be thus with His voice, recollect

¹ Phil. iv. 8.

² Col. iii. 14.

³ 2 S. Pet. i. 5—7.

that, after all, the commendation of good men *is* a blessing; we know it well when they have passed away. They are men indeed, so we must not lay too great store by what they tell us of ourselves; but as the servants of God they are the instruments by which He ministers, in His mercy, to our poor human infirmity, bidding us by the tongue, not of angels but of men, be of good cheer, and move forward from the spot to which we have already attained, to heights which are beyond yet not impossible. How seasonable to us, at times, is such a word! how upholding against the sinkings of despair! how stablishing to our patience, our perseverance, our wavering hope of everlasting life! Only let us ask ourselves at all such moments of help, whether ours is in truth the Christian rule: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the LORD."¹ Then, according to the way we take that aid, shall it be shown in which direction we are moving.

(5.) For finally, remember, that it is the trial of a Christian, not the inclination of the children of this world, which we are considering together. It is an awful contrast between the two, and we see by the example of the Pharisees what it is to look, first on human opinion, last on the will of God. The wise man's warning is as applicable now as ever: "As the fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his *praise*."² Our FATHER is, even in

¹ 1 Cor. i. 31.

² Prov. xxvii. 21.

this way, putting us to the proof. When we are tempted to be lifted up, let us call to mind those secret sins which are in the light of His countenance, and then, as we humble ourselves before Him, He will exalt us with His own right hand, and accept us "in the Beloved," as living members of Him Who sprang out of Judah, "whose praise is not of men, but of God."¹

¹ Rom. ii. 29; Heb. vii. 14; Gen. xlix. 8.

XII.

CALUMNY.

S. MATTH. V. 11.

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake."

IF praise amid sinfulness is a trial to some of us, how much more generally is our Christian character tested by the way in which we bear the very opposite of this—the blame which is not deserved! We must be prepared for it, as soon as ever we come to serve the LORD. The more thorough our religion, the more bitter will be the enmity stirred up against us. Or—to bring the matter more home to ourselves, who are chiefly beginners in true religion, only "babes in CHRIST"—even the commencement of our change will often be the signal for the attack of those who love Him not. In the words of a great teacher of the Church, who knew what it was to have to stand almost alone on the LORD's side, "as soon as worldly people perceive that you desire to lead a devout life, they will discharge at you a thousand arrows of mockery and detraction." The as-

sumption of the armour of God is a challenge to His foes, and the use of the means of His grace will be sure to bring out those assaults of the devil or man which are allowed to prove us.

Now in these days the course of calumny is very different from what it was in the times of the early Church. Then, it was the faith and worship and practice of Christians as a body, that formed the mark for slander. Then, because the disciples had no images, and, as yet, no temples, they were denounced as atheists: we have the actual name of one (Acilius Glabrio) who was even put to death on that charge; because they were obliged to meet in secret, for their common prayers and the celebration of the Divine Mysteries, it was said that the most abominable things, child-murder, and grossest impurity, were done in their assemblies; because floods and fires, pestilences and earthquakes, took place, these were thought to call for punishment upon the Christians for their impiety: "everywhere" (as we know from the saying in the imperial city) the Church was "spoken against."¹ But, though many of us, had we lived in the persecutions of Nero and Domitian, would have deserted the troubled army of God, that army itself survived the peril of generation after generation, and is marching on, with its millions instead of its thousands, under His banner. And now, evil report is hushed about the Church as a

¹ Acts xxviii. 22.

whole, and though its doctrines and its devotions are questioned, they are not, as a rule, misrepresented. It is against the separate soldiers that the "bitter words" are now shot forth: it is the life and conversation of individual Christians that slander now besets: and every one of us who "will live godly in CHRIST JESUS" must be prepared for *this* "persecution."¹ But remember, that just *because* it is so personal it is so trying—more trying perhaps in the main, even than those outward violent siftings which the saints of the first and second centuries had to undergo. "For," as Bishop Moberly says,² those "who are assailed by it have to bear their troubles mostly *in secret*. They have little sympathy from others, nor any of the rising of the spirit of heroism which, when men's eyes are upon it, is naturally roused into energetic resistance. When the persecution for righteousness' sake takes place in the sight of men, several things tend to hold a man up in his endurance. But it is otherwise with all the secret, and, if I may so call it, unpicturesque suffering of social or domestic life,—the chill, and the estrangement, and the unkindness, and the evil report, and the misrepresentation, the thwarting and jealousy, all the details of inward and unseen misery which go to make up the real persecution which has visited, and no doubt visits still, thousands of people whose heart's desire it is to serve God faithfully, and who are content to bear

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 12.² The Beatitudes.

with evil for CHRIST's sake." It is an affliction which we must be content to meet, not indeed in our own strength, but alone.

Very various are the modes in which we suffer from it. Sometimes, sudden enmity raises a passing suspicion against us, from which we recover almost immediately. Sometimes, malice or envy lays a plot for our good name, and we have to wait a while ere we are cleared. Sometimes, through deliberate false witness which we have not the means of disproving, dark clouds rest upon us all our life long. But in any case the trial, while it lasts, is a very real one, and till we are close to God, we feel it to the quick. Yes! even though we fancy beforehand, that we could bear any such detraction, when the time comes, we find it most difficult to bear. O soul, so brave in the forecasting of ill, so helpful to others in bidding them be of good cheer in that uprightness of their ways which is winning them, in spite of reproach, the commendation of God, take heed lest this be the taunt which thou hearest: "Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest: it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."¹ Experience, after all, is the great teacher in such matters. You may tell a man, over and over again, that "there is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword,"² and he

¹ Job iv. 4, 5.

² Prov. xii. 18.

will answer you, that he is ready for the revilings of men ; but it is not till he is himself among those who are set on fire, "whose teeth are spears and arrows," that the thoughts of his inmost heart are revealed, the real measure of his confidence, or of his want of confidence, towards God. How sharply we are stung by the censure of our good deeds, by the imputing of wrong motives to us, by the groundless charge of some one faulty act, or some secret vice, or some habit of sin ! And no wonder ; for it is an image of Holy Scripture itself, that these who thus do violence to others, "have whet their tongues like a serpent," and that "adder's poison is under their lips."¹ But as the serpent's tongue is forked, and has a double point, so the venom of slanderous speech penetrates in two directions, for it reaches the ear and mind of the listener, and the heart and reputation of the person against whom it is uttered. And this reminds us why we feel so keenly this enmity of man. It hinders us in our work and intercourse with others. With some among us it even involves the loss of the labour by which we support ourselves and our families, or the forfeiture of a post of trust in which we thought we could do good for many years. Or, it withdraws from us those whom we had reckoned among our friends ; under the influence of these shameful reproaches "I become a stranger unto my brethren,

¹ Ps. cxl. 3.

even an alien unto my mother's children."¹ The very familiar ones in whom we trusted, and who seemed to count us trustworthy also, believe some idle tale against us, and separation begins. Or it makes daily life trying to us in the presence of near neighbours, so that common occupations become almost burdensome to us, while we feel that we are watched step by step, and suspected whatever we do. And so, we are forced to stand more or less by ourselves, despised and misunderstood, meeting with little or no sympathy, almost alone in the crowd. Truly, this is a grief which none can fathom save those who have themselves been saddened by it, and which most of us, when we do pass through it, show that we feel, by our unwillingness to rest under it.

And yet, what is a Christian worth, if he cannot endure this trial! Surely, as we are not to love the praise of men, so neither are we to fear their blame; and the fact that we do still fear it, seems to prove that we are not sufficiently stablished in that faith and holiness which set our feet upon the Rock. To use the beautiful illustration of S. Francis de Sales,² "towns which have wooden bridges over great rivers, fear their being carried away by every flood, but those which have bridges of stone apprehend only extraordinary inundations; so they who have a soul solidly grounded in Christian virtue, despise the overflowing of injurious tongues, but they who feel themselves

¹ Ps. lxi. 8.

² The Devout Life, pt. iii. ch. vii.

weak are disturbed by every idle story." I am afraid there are many of us, advancing Christians, it may be, but not such as can glory in the Cross of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, since we are not yet crucified unto the world, nor the world to us. How shall we learn that higher, calmer, more courageous, more steadfast life, in which that glorified Sufferer becomes our shield here, our exceeding great Reward hereafter?

1. First, we must let His own rule, His own wise, though to us strange, teaching, bring us back: "*Blessed* are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake"—*so* blessed that He tells us we can "rejoice and be exceeding glad."¹ When, because we belong to Him, and do His service, and use His ministrations, and abide in His Love, and seek His Strength, we are defamed, it is, in one sense, a true comfort to us, for it shows that we are not of the world. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."² It hated Him before it hated us, and the more we hold up His standard, and live His Truth, and work His will, the more we must expect that the reproaches of them that reproached Him will fall upon us. There is joy in the very thought; for we are sharing

¹ S. Matth. v. 11, 12.

² S. John xv. 19.

His shame, and therein is the foretaste of His crown, the promise of the great blessings of heaven.

2. And next, in the full recollection of this assurance of our LORD's, and with His warning still ringing in our hearts of the danger of all men speaking well of us, let us bear in mind how vain, either way, is human judgment. "Let not thy peace," urges the devout à Kempis, "depend upon the word of fallible men; for whether they be good or bad interpreters of thy conduct, they cannot render thee a different creature." To take a lower line, because the world dislikes the higher one, would be to sink into the drowning deep instead of spreading out our hands to swim for our very life. The cry is from below, and you must keep above, "in nothing terrified by your adversaries," for their persecution of you "is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God."¹ Quiet continuance in well-doing, humble disregard of the voices on the right hand and of the voices on the left, the upward eye, not the downward ear, the patient and active endeavour to raise others to the level where God has placed us for no merit of our own, instead of slipping down to their level with which we once were satisfied, the holy boldness of a soul fearless in its own convictions and expectations, whatever be the clamours of the ungodly and the infidel,—a course like this will either silence oppo-

¹ Phil. i. 28.

sition or will silence it *to us*, it will either show our enemies the more excellent way or it will encourage us to walk therein more resolutely ourselves.

3. But there may still be at times that hindrance of which we spoke. The bitter words are carefully aimed, and suddenly they may hit us. And now for a special remedy, compounded, as most spiritual remedies are, with the humility which befits a Christian. When the calumny does fall upon us, whatever others, whose opinion we value, may think of it, let *us* remember, that though through the grace of God we deserve not that particular blame, blame and much heavier than that which we suffer, *is* our due. If men knew the secrets of our hearts as they are known to Him, they would have much harder and much truer things to say of us. How overwhelmed we should be with shame could they but tell to a few the dark and evil deeds of our past lives, the low, and earthly, and impure imaginations which we are cherishing even now, the unworthy schemes and selfish wishes wherewith we are darkening the future! Nay, would not the familiar friends, the very few who uphold us when we are slanderously reported, shrink back from us with horror,

" If Heaven for once its searching light
Lent to some partial eye, disclosing all
The rude bad thoughts, that in our bosom's night
Wander at large, nor heed Love's gentle thrall?"¹

¹ "Christian Year," (24th Sunday after Trinity.)

There is a judgment which scans already all that is hidden in our life: and though it is a judgment in mercy, so that we would rather submit ourselves to it than fall into the hands of man, yet it is a judgment according unto truth: if no grace shall be overlooked by it, neither, except we repent, shall any sin. It is indeed and it ought to be a very small thing with us that we should be judged of man's judgment: but even though our conscience should clear us with regard to their accusations, we are "not hereby justified:" for He that judgeth us is the LORD.¹

4. And so, since we are sure that He can mark so much that is infinitely blameworthy in us, let the blame which is not deserved drive us more into ourselves, that we may look well, guided by God's eye, if there be any wicked way in us, and that we may cleanse our souls where only they *can* be cleansed, in "the precious Blood of CHRIST." Nothing can be an absolute curse to us which sends us thither—not the doubt which makes us examine our faith and see, to our comfort, on what it rests; not the hatred which forces us into the better friendship, the perfect love of JESUS; not the scandal which compels us no longer to put our trust in any child of man, but to fly to Him Who alone can hide us safe in His wounded side. Specially must it be beyond measure good for us, to meet with such treatment from men

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 4.

as casts us down, in order that we may not be disappointed of our one Sure Refuge, in deeper, more heart-searching repentance than we had ever known in the days of man's commendation. Then, even that loneliness which forms, as we saw, so bitter a part of our trial, is blest to us ; for it shows us ourselves with a clearness which we could not attain when we were distracted by the appearances around us ! and the sight produces in us a true seriousness and a godly sorrow, and we learn to be more faithful in proportion as we are more penitent. We humble ourselves, and we are exalted far above the reach of lying words.

5. But then, how is this ? As we need not be dejected by giving overmuch heed to the foolish and malicious sayings of others, so must we seek something better than the constant contemplation of ourselves. It is into the Presence of God that we must withdraw if we would be kept secretly in His Tabernacle from the strife of tongues : in *His* Presence we must hide ourselves, who trieth the hearts and reins, and looketh not to the mere outward appearance. In His holy, peaceful, consoling, illuminating Presence you must quietly, patiently, reverently rest. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in Him, and He shall bring it to pass : He shall make thy righteousness as clear as the light, and thy just dealing as the noon-day."¹ Fear Him, and you

¹ Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6.

shall have nothing else to fear. "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye,—for,"—though ye are troubled outwardly, "the SPIRIT of glory and of God resteth upon you."¹ Love Him, and you shall no longer crave for the affectionate regard of men, no longer be "afraid of their terror." Serve Him, and you shall have none of those awful disappointments which result from labouring for the praise of the world. How gloriously the great Voice speaks to you then; with what tender pity for your infirmities; with what a Fatherly rebuke for your misgivings! "I, even I, am He that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?"² His consolations, when we do trustfully use them, are sweeter and mightier than we can conceive. Devoting soul and body to our Christian service, and casting ourselves in humility and faith on Him, we find that He does in a marvellous way hide us privily in His "own Presence from the provoking of all men."³ We cannot be cast out therefrom, for we are "accepted in the Beloved."

6. But then, once more, this sole ground of our acceptance must remind us that to be evil spoken of is not in itself a cause of happiness, It is only if we

¹ S. Pet. iii. 13, 14; iv. 14.

² Isa. li. 12.

³ Ps. xxxi. 20.

are "reproached for the Name of *Christ*,"¹ that a blessing comes forth from the trouble. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you . . . for *My sake*."² We are taking it for granted throughout that this is a trial of our *Christian* life, suffered because we belong to CHRIST, endurable because we are in Him. We shrink from calumny in the weakness of our mortal nature ; we shrink from it as desiring a good word from our fellows ; we shrink from it, for our flesh and blood finds the unseen warfare difficult, and the solitary journey long. But for His sake, when we remember Who He was, and how He died for us, the Son of God, yet slain as a malefactor, for His sake we are willing to suffer reproof, even though shame should cover our face. So, when the trial presses, O my friends, let us think of our sins and of His sinlessness, and though we have to bear the trial even to our graves, let us "consider Him Who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest" we "be wearied and faint in" our "minds."³ Then, though we do *well* and suffer for it, we shall take it patiently ; for even hereunto—to this acceptable self-sacrifice—were we called by the example of Him Who suffered for us, the Just for the unjust, and "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again ; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously."⁴

¹ 1 S. Pet. iv. 14.² S. Matth. v. 11.³ Heb. xii. 3.⁴ 1 S. Pet. ii. 23.

XIII.

WANT OF COURAGE.

PS. LVI. 8.

"What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee."

TRUE fearlessness is one sure sign of a Christian. Yet part of the sinful infirmity which we confess, after all that God has done for us, and though He is our only hope and strength, will too often be that dread of men, which tempts us both to deny our Lord, and to swerve from His narrow way. This dread, however, is not the same as that shrinking from slander, which we have just considered, but extends over a much wider field, and, if not so sharp a trial as the other, is a far subtler one. For it meets us almost at every turn, and enters into our most hidden thoughts and purposes; it besets us in our work and in our worship; it mingles with the motives of our charity; it puts our best principles to the test; it seeks to check the expression of our faith; it would affect our conduct and conversation in society; it has a little room of its own in our very house; it disturbs our inmost heart, when we should

otherwise be moving steadily onwards, in the power of the faith and love of God. There is, with too many of us, a fear that others may hurt us, that others may dislike us, or misunderstand, or hinder, or thwart us, that they may condemn us as hypocrites, or despise us as serious, that they may think us mean or scheming—a fear, that even our near acquaintance may, if we do this or that, forsake us—a fear that it will not go well with us in the world, and that we may have to stand almost alone—a fear which we acknowledge to be real, even though we know it to be wrong—a fear which gains ground upon us at times, though, whenever we resolutely resist it, we have the testimony of our conscience to encourage us.

Now this sort of alarm has in some measure been felt by many of God's best servants: they have felt it as a trial, even where they have not long, if at all, yielded to it as a temptation. Even the holy Psalmist, while he gathers himself up for a fuller confidence in God, has evidently personal experience of his own weakness apart from God: "*I am afraid,*" yet I "*trust in Thee.*" My fear *was* there, only the LORD delivered me out of all my fear. So too should we find, if we could look into the souls of men, that some of those, whom we think most brave and steadfast, and who do generally show, by their brave and steadfast lives, that they have conquered themselves, have after all often a hard battle to fight,

before they can rise superior to the opinions and threatenings of men.

And, what is more, we often meet, both in Holy Scripture, and in that which Holy Scripture so exactly reflects—common life—with characters of special grace, whose faith breaks down awhile under the pressure of the trial. In that sacred Book which never keeps back the truth from us, but reveals, as in a mirror, the falls and faintings, the doubts and questionings, the imperfections and backslidings, of those who are generally our examples, we see even great saints waver, through this very cause, in their belief and their integrity. Wherefore said Abram of Sarai, "She is my sister?" He was afraid that it would not be well with him, if the men knew that she was his wife.¹ Why, when his name was changed in token of the covenant which God had made with him to be his God, did he still utter to Abimelech only a half-truth of her who was the princess of the world, under the Lord's special protection? Because, instead of relying on that Almighty Arm, he thought that they would slay him for his wife's sake.² How was it that in that self-same land Isaac did exactly as his father had done, and disowned his union with Rebekah? Because again, he "feared to say, She is my wife."³ Why was it, that though prayer would have shown to Elijah the seven thousand still loyal

¹ Gen. xii. 11.

² Gen. xx. 2.

³ Gen. xxvi. 7.

to God in Israel, he yet hurried away from his post of duty to find a refuge in the desert? Because, forgetful of the day when he stood alone with God against the multitude, and was victorious, he now feared for his life.¹ What made S. Peter, generally so firm upon the Rock, dissemble and vacillate at Antioch? He feared them of the circumcision.² What made S. Paul, who had withstood that older apostle to the face when he was to be blamed, have at another time no rest in his own spirit? "Without were fightings, within were fears."³ As it was with some of the great lights of either dispensation, so has it constantly been with Christians ever since—so is it too often with Christians now. Martyrs, failing for a brief space, yet recovering for martyrdom even unto death—confessors, ashamed for a little while, yet in the end so confessing CHRIST as to die for Him—men of self-sacrifice, giving up home and country and ease and enjoyment for the Crucified, falling back now and then, through reluctance to encounter opposition, yet at last even sacrificing *themselves* in devotion to their LORD—these are but types and patterns of those so commonly found even among the truest Christians, and of those of us who, however imperfect, heartily wish and strive to be Christians—of those whose faith indeed is in the heart, but whose denial is, alas! too near

¹ 1 Kings xix. 18.

² Gal. ii. 12.

³ 2 Cor. vii. 5.

the lips—of those who can rejoice in the prayers and Communion and labours of the Church of God, but who are too ready, at the approach of men with swords and staves, to forsake Him and flee—too ready, at the proving voice of a little maid, to give up our moral courage, and say we know neither CHRIST nor His work.

Happy at least if we do feel, after our falls, bitterly grieved by them! happy, if they make us realise that, even in regard to our measure of concern about the judgments, the censure, the enmity, of men and women, we are constantly on trial during this life, from the beginning of our discipleship even to its earthly close! But *do* we seriously consider this? Do we recollect, we who name the Name of CHRIST, and are bound by that profession to depart from iniquity, and to beware of denying Him before men, do we recollect with pain how much this cowardice makes us neglect prayer, so that we hardly dare to be found upon our knees at home or joining the two or three in the courts of the LORD'S House on a week-day? how it inclines us to forego the study of the Scriptures as if we were actually ashamed of the words of God, which we know to be more necessary to us than our food? how, again and again, it prevents us from being strictly truthful, though in our hearts we hate a lie? how it renders it grievous to us to bow down our ear to the poor, when, if we were quite alone, we should be willing to help him

at his need? how, in short, we suffer it, not once nor twice, to interfere with our life for God, and our devotion to that service which has become to us already, in days of greater courage, perfect freedom?

O this timidity threatens to take the very heart out of our religion—to make us men-pleasing, self-indulgent persons, rather than those who are learning to renounce self and the world by fearing God! Yes, and is it not all the worse now, since we have so much less to apprehend in those around us? Though persecution is such a different thing from what it was, when it did injury to life or limb, it seems as if our cowardice increased in proportion as the risk diminishes. Death, bodily torture, loss of liberty, it is not these that we have now-a-days to expect for our refusal to abjure the Crucified, or for our faithful continuance in His holy ways. Yet we fear that men will discredit our good name, or hurt us in our business, if we act in such and such a manner, though it be right: or that men will laugh at us for this or that deed or word, however much the LORD is on our side; or that men will at least no longer befriend us, if we have the courage to take a particular line, which we are certain will commend us to God. We fear: and in our fear we fall, and through us the name of CHRIST is blasphemed. Assuredly, though there are many hopeful symptoms at the present day, one of the bad signs is this miserable timidity, which makes even devout Communicants—

Christians otherwise faithful—unwilling to uphold what is pure and sound and true; unwilling to stand altogether aloof from practices which are a disgrace to us; unwilling to walk steadily onward in the path of high principle and religious duty, without turning to the right hand or to the left. We know that this is a tendency too common, and probably we are sorry for it. But let us begin by bewailing it in ourselves, and by thinking what we can do to cleanse our own way, in respect to this fear of men.*

1. And first, as the prophet was instructed of old, so does God instruct us with a strong hand in these latter days: "Fear ye not their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of Hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread; and He shall be for a sanctuary."¹ As God which is perfect in Glory allows us to glorify Him by the adoration of our voices and the obedience of our lives, so are we taught that God which is Holy can even be sanctified in the righteousness of His sons and daughters, and by their practical reverence for His great and fearful Name. And as the House of Prayer, when we hallow it by the abasement of the body and the devotion of the soul, becomes to us a Holy Home and constant Refuge, so when that LORD Who dwelleth in us is honoured by our thorough, undivided love and service, and feared continually, and most of all when we are withstanding the influ-

¹ Isa. viii. 12—14.

ence of some other fear, does He in His mercy make Himself to us a very Sanctuary—a strong Tower of Defence and Rest into which we may run and be safe. This, and this alone, can explain the heroic courage which a child of God can maintain in the midst of a Dothan encompassed with foes, or of a crowd which is stoning him to death. There is the full conviction that the FATHER's honour, the Master's fear, must at all times be chiefly considered; and then the chariots of fire are indeed quite close, and in the opened Heavens there stands the Divine Intercessor, "mighty to save."

2. And so we are reminded, next, that, in order to be out of the reach of this penetrating fear, we must act on principle, and not only from impulse. Not the feelings of the moment, but the faith which sets us a-working from the first, must be our rule when we get among men, and see the difficulties before us. For if we have but feelings to direct us, our feelings will vary as our company varies, or even with our bodily health; but when faith is in its secret seat within, even the tired limbs go on with their labours for CHRIST, and the very presence of new companions puts us more thoroughly on our guard, and at each occasion, the question which we ask is not, what can I safely do with these at hand? but "LORD, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?"¹ Then, while in accordance with the Apostle's charge, you try not to

¹ Acts ix. 6.

let "your good be evil spoken of,"¹ you will not hesitate about doing what is right, because in the eyes of the world it may have some semblance of evil. Still less, will you shrink from truth in word, or honesty in deed, or purity in both, through any false shame, any dread of ridicule or of ill repute. It is this acting on principle, this resolution to hold on a steady course, this habit of walking with an invisible God, which has nerved and strengthened those best servants of His, the most assailed, the most thoroughly single-handed, yet the most victorious : *S. John the Baptist*, not fearing the wrath of a king, but rebuking him for his vice, and then content to go really "to prison and to death," because there too, as in his life, he was preparing the way of the LORD ; *Daniel*, clinging to his prayer three times a day, though the law of the nation was against the Law of his God ; *Jeremiah*, a very child, as he felt himself to be, when told to rebuke all the people of the land, and taught not to be "dismayed at their faces;" *Joseph*, without a friend, as it seemed, on earth, yet cleaving to the One Friend above, Whom his tempters and persecutors saw not ; *Enoch*, the preacher of righteousness, confronting the whole world in its corruption, because he was ever with God :—these and such as these, bright elements of the vast cloud of witnesses, these and those later saints who had not only, like the others, Gospel promises, but Gospel

¹ Rom. xiv. 18.

grace—*S. Stephen*, the angelically brave; *S. Luke*, the beloved physician, not ashamed of an Apostle's chain; *S. Paul*, himself imperilled everywhere, yet everywhere intent, not on safety, but on salvation, not on the life which was his, but on the life which was CHRIST's in him; *S. John*, the continual sufferer, serving in patience or in revelation the LORD Who loved him, without fear—yea! the whole "glorious company of the Apostles" rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name; the steadfast disciples of the days when Christians were evil-intreated through tyrants, yet would not sacrifice to devils to save their lives; the faithful ones, of whom we have read, and of whom our fathers have told us, finding deliverance through *not* regarding men; those whom we have known ourselves, in childhood some, in youth or manhood others, who would not lie, or be dishonest, or drunken, or share in filthy conversation, or in deeds of darkness, because they feared God most—these all, and at the head of them their King, the greatest Witness of all; Him Who bore for us all shame and anguish and contradiction, the scoffing word as well as the piercing spear, Him Who has set before us all these His saints in the way of Christian courage and devotion and perseverance, and then walked therein Himself till they crucified Him, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds.

3. Occasionally indeed, as we marked in some of

the noblest, there will still be yieldings of our poor human nature, holpen though it be, to the assault which tries us. Only let us, as they did, rise up at once when we do fall, and give ourselves more thoroughly to God, listening calmly for His Voice whatever may be the many sounds in the air, the many sights and calls by which men would make us afraid. The consequences of our choice, the consequences of our mode of meeting the trial, should, as we consider them, do much to persuade us. Think *whither* this fear, if you did time after time give yourself up to it, might lead you—denial following denial, defeat bringing on defeat, the character weakening, the heart failing, the promises lessening, CHRIST more and more out of the Christian's sight. Then, the injury which we do to *others*, by being afraid of them, the slight value which we teach them to put upon the offered strength of the HOLY GHOST, the encouragement they gain, through our weakness, for their own low standard, the way in which we make them, by their easy victory, trust in themselves. Then, the help which we might bring these very souls, if we would but be fearless for CHRIST! what wholesome sorrow we might work in them, like that which the first martyr caused in the persecuting Saul! what seeds of conversion, like that which the blood of the one proved to the heart of the other! what zeal for God and for His Church our steadfast patience might produce! what lasting good our example

might work, constraining the injurious to "endure hardness," and the troublers of Israel to be themselves princes with God, and those who once strove to shake the confidence of others to become faithful unto death ! And this at least, my friends, shall be our blessing : more and more within us will be deepened, by His grace, our trust in God : more and more will the words of the Psalmist speak within our heart as good and comfortable words : "The LORD is my Light and my Salvation ; whom shall I fear ? The LORD is the Strength of my life ; of whom shall I be afraid ?"¹ And more and more, while we remember that great and terrible day, when "the fearful" shall have their part with "the unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars,"² will the promise to the brave soldier of CHRIST come home to us as our very own : "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My FATHER in His Throne."³

¹ Ps. xxvii. 1.

² Rev. xxi. 8.

³ Rev. iii. 21.

XIV.

DISTRACTION.

PSALM CXLIII. 8—10.

"Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto Thee. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto Thee to hide me. Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God."

AS servants of CHRIST, we are bound to "attend upon the LORD without distraction."¹ Yet this is exactly what we find it so hard to do, and which the Apostle, while he tells us of it, acknowledges to be hard for many, who, though in one of the holy estates of life, are yet liable to be disturbed by many things. Distraction is not only the snare of a divided heart, not only the misery of a very busy life; it is also the trial of a soul which is neither engrossed by worldly pursuits nor yet self-deceived like the double-minded man, but which still has much difficulty in keeping clear of the perils, and unbeliefs, and pleasures, and cares, and fears, and scruples which beset it here. The very word which

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 35.

is rendered "distraction," suggests to us our being drawn off on various sides, on all sides, from faith and labour. And is not this exactly our experience? The surroundings are so manifold in themselves, so different in their effects upon us, so unexpected in their influence on our heart and life, as we go forward day by day. Sometimes the sight is a grand glory of the world, sometimes a mere glance of the eye: now, the sound is so loud that we can scarcely help giving heed to it, and presently there is only a whisper, but a whisper which prevails with us: on one morning present enjoyment is as nothing to us, on the next, it seems to fill our thoughts: last night we were devoted to the defence of God's truth, and to the shielding of another's purity, and this evening we are like one possessed with a devil, selfish and unclean: yesterday, immediate evil was sufficient for me, to-day I am disquieted with anxiety about to-morrow, with forebodings as to a still more distant future: here there is nothing to make you afraid, but there, sudden alarms rise up, and you can scarcely move on: one while, we pass resolutely forward in spite of fancies, at another point of the journey some disease of the mind hides from us our very plainest duty. All these things are against us; daily and hourly we are being hindered in our Christian course. As, in society, we call a person *distract* whose attention is evidently fixed on matters far apart from the conversation in which he professes to

be engaged, so, in spiritual concerns, we are often conscious to ourselves of our real self being taken off from the worship or the work of God by objects which close the eye and ear of faith, and make us forgetful of that spiritual Presence in which we are. He is indeed a happy Christian who is either so steadfast as to be able to march on, disregarding these by-paths on the right hand and on the left, or so penitent as to have come back from them, intent henceforth on the narrow way, and on the Voice which sounds, along its whole length, to the listening heart. But with most of us it is very different. Our onward course is constantly being interrupted. Other lights than that of the heavenly city occupy our gaze. Other messages than those of the Great King are heard about us. We feel as if we could not exercise ourselves in talking with God, or in getting nearer to Him, because some new thing is brought before us, or because some old familiar interest has to be noticed by us. As, in certain states of weakness or ill-health, even slight sounds, like the ticking of a clock, or the song of a bird, or the play of a child, irritate the brain and prevent it from working, so, because of our spiritual infirmity, we are again and again prevented from going on unto perfection, through something apparently trifling in itself, utterly trifling in comparison of higher things, yet enough to attract us for the moment, and to put out of view the resolutions and purposes which God is urging us

to fulfil. When we realise what it is to be thus easily distracted, we may well feel cast down at our own sinful shortcomings, our own lack of thoroughness, our own frequently recurring misuse of the time which is so brief yet so important. No wonder if we ask how we shall ever win our way home to the land of righteousness—how we shall ever be saved by that SAVIOUR Who requires us to *look* unto Him if we would be saved. There *is* deliverance, there *are* aids to the steadying of our faith and the quickening of our feet. But ere you turn to these, mark how there is even a blessing in the trial, tending to admonish and to strengthen us.

Do we not learn from it the number and the vigour of our enemies—convincing reasons these for the watchfulness and activity of a soldier? Till we do learn this, there is such danger of our service becoming slothful, and of the weapons of our warfare being laid aside. And we must remember that though it is often the peculiar character of the country through which we are marching which imperils us, yet it is these very points of vantage which the adversary seizes in order to surprise and overthrow us. This shows us the true weight which we should attach to the excuses of those who say that these things do but lie naturally in our way, and that therefore we need not be so very much on our guard against them. So far from this, we are taught to prepare for crafty assaults in the places where we might otherwise least

expect them—the very houses of our friends, the very rest and food of our homes. “Ambushed lies the evil one: watch and pray.”

Again, do we not learn herefrom our own powerlessness for good—that painful lesson which the more we study it humbles us so much the more? One who is not a Christian is of course self-sufficient; but pride is so natural to us all, that even when we are Christians it is a hard matter to be lowly with our Lord. Nay, more! though we have advanced some distance, and are able spiritually to discern the things of God, even this may make us imagine that we are standing of ourselves, and seeing of ourselves; and it is sometimes only a fall which brings us the sad but wholesome knowledge of our infirmity and blindness, and then forces us to lay hold of Him Who is indeed strong, and to submit ourselves to the sure, straightforward guidance of the HOLY GHOST.

For, once more, are we not taught, by the fact of our being so distracted, our absolute need of God at every step? Hither and thither troop our foes: “The tabernacles of the Edomites and Ishmaelites, the Moabites and Hagarenes: Gebal and Ammon and Amalek: the Philistines, with them that dwell at Tyre; Assur is also joined with them, and have holpen the children of Lot.”¹ Each turn of the road, each stage of our journey, brings us face to face with some of them: how many they are, how subtle, how

¹ Ps. lxxxiii. 6—8.

continually reappearing! Now it is an open enemy, now one in the garb of our fellows, now a traitor from our camp; now it is our own lust which draws us away, now our love of ease, now the backwardness of our will. Here in the House of God, where it should have seemed least possible, there in our private prayers, when we thought we had shut out the world, and in our reading of the Sacred Scriptures, which must be so hateful to Satan, our minds begin to wander, and we suffer from distraction, and we lose the spirit in the letter, the object of worship in the act of worshipping; where we fancied ourselves most secure, we find ourselves falling away. What a warning to us! Had we not forgotten that God, not man, must be the centre of the House of God, that the inspiring SPIRIT must be regarded in the inspired Scriptures, that prayer must be not the mere repetition of a form, nor the mere recital of a book of devotions, but our own personal calling on our own Personal LORD? Had we not forgotten, that unless He is with us, Who is "fairer than the children of men," the beauty of His creatures will divert us constantly; unless we are abiding in Him, Whose Strength is made perfect in our weakness, the strong man armed will gain the victory over us whenever we meet him unawares? Surely, our cry is that of the Psalmist: "Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies; I flee unto Thee to hide me."¹

¹ Ps. cxliii. 9.

Then, if we are in earnest, He will commune with us, and will show us that though we cannot yet be perfect, we can at least make head against this distraction of which we are speaking. May one venture to express, in very feeble words, His wise and loving counsel?

1. First, think what you have renounced—*all but God*. “My son,” He saith, “give Me thine heart.”¹ He did not, indeed, call upon us to forsake all the desires of the flesh—for these were His own creation in us—but only its *sinful* lusts. He did not bid us come out of the world, for He had given us our work to do there, and there was our probation to be; but we were to turn away from its pomps and vanity. He did not mean us to suppose that we had nothing to do with others, for He set us in His Church, but He made us members—individual members—members who were to have their own office and work in that Body of His SON. He did not require of us, at every moment to be thinking or talking of Him, but only, that our hearts should be devoted to Him from the first, and ready to labour for Him.

2. And so, next, we are to aim at doing all for God. “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”² If our one prime wish is to please God, we shall not long be distressed by the darkness, or divided in our mind. There is always a way out

¹ Prov. xxiii. 26.

² S. Matth. vi. 22.

of a difficulty—always an escape from a temptation—always a power of choice for good, no less than for evil; but it is often known only to God, and it is not till we simply seek His glory, and look right up to Him, that He informs us and teaches us, and guides us with His eye.

3. And then, as a help towards this singleness of heart and purpose, we must *live by rule*. Let us remember the Apostolic charge: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."¹ To a man of the world, it would be mere foolishness, but to a Christian, anxious for an undistracted heart, it may be helpful to say: Keep to some settled measure for eating and drinking—some regular day for abstinence—some fixed time for prayer and for the study of the word; and then, let nothing interfere with this, but regard it as unto the LORD, and be not ashamed to tell people so. Otherwise you will be fearing them more than you fear Him. So too with respect to that highest means of grace—the Holy Communion—make it an absolute rule to come when you can; let no visitors, no business, no uncertainty of weather, no vain excuses keep you away on that day: remember CHRIST's command, your own weak, sinful, fragile life—and examine yourself, and repent, and come; it will enable you to have all your fresh springs in JESUS CHRIST—in Him, new motives for soberness and chastity,

¹ 1 Cór. x. 31.

in Him new calls to honest work, in Him new restraints from selfishness and sin, in Him "newness of life." And it will help to keep you from *idols*; so that, whatever be the attractions of others, you will care for Him most.

4. Thus there shall be growing daily in your heart a principle of union with God, which will keep you more and more amid temptations. This will uphold you under a weight of sorrows which might otherwise sever you from faith and love. This will make all occasions of gladness or woe minister to the consolation of others through the comfort wherewith you yourself are comforted. Then, when perils come, they will not distract you, for you will be safe in God; nor will the shifting unbeliefs, as they arise for a moment, drifting over the great Rock, for your trust will be in God; nor pleasures, for you will look forward to the fulness of joy in God; nor cares, for you will rest in God; nor fears, for you will always hope in God; nor morbid scruples, for you will have found cheerfulness and peace and a sound mind in God. God abideth ever, faileth never; and He has shown us on the one hand, that, if we abide in Him, He will freely give us all things, and on the other hand, that we cannot possibly sacrifice too much for Him, since He, for our sakes, did sacrifice Himself.

XV.

THE LOW TONE OF FAMILIAR FRIENDS.

MICAH VII. 6, 7.

"A man's enemies are the men of his own house. Therefore I will look unto the Lord ; I will wait for the God of my salvation : my God will hear me."

ADAM fell, because he hearkened to the voice of his wife. Home difficulties, after all, are often the chief trial ; and it is not uncommon to find a Christian comparatively proof against the distracting influences of the outside world, while those of the inner circle disturb his rest and his faith, because, like the stronger drawings of an approaching magnet, they are closer to him. Our LORD taught us that it would be so ; He prepared us, by not only repeating these words of His prophet, but by evidently making them a warning as from Himself, to expect foes in those of our own household.¹ It was, indeed, the tendency of that Fire of the HOLY SPIRIT, which was to be kindled on earth, after the sacrificed and risen SAVIOUR had returned to heaven, to bring out,

¹ S. Matth. x. 35, 36.

even in families, the sharp division between believers and unbelievers.¹ For it was a Fire which purified some, and fevered others—and so it was a Fire of separation, marking off, in anticipation of the judgment, those who served God from those who served Him not.² And though for all who would receive the truth, there should be, through this very agreement in the truth, peace with one another as with God, yet oneness of heart can only be gained through this unity in the faith, and CHRIST Himself has shown us, how very different the result of His Gospel would be from man's mistaken rendering of the angels' song: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, nay: but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three."³ If we were more loyal to God than we are—if we cared as much for His glory, as for an easy life with others—if His truth were as precious to us as the affection of our intimates, this awful prediction would become one of very practical concern to us. It is our cowardice that mars the purpose, the apparently severe but really gracious purpose, of the LORD—our preference for the praise of men over the praise of God—our soul-destroying, self-destroying abuse of the influence which He has given us in our homes. Let the Cross of CHRIST have its place

¹ S. Luke xii. 49—53.

² See Mal. iii. 2, 3, 18.

³ S. Luke xii. 51, 52.

there, let the Gospel of CHRIST do its work there, and then, it will either triumph over all opposition, and change His enemies into His friends, or else, while those members who hate Him perish in spite of warning, they who love Him shall at least save their own souls alive. It sounds terrible to say such things; it seems so alien to the spirit of sympathy and goodwill which is natural to us, so unlike that growth which is not of nature merely, but of grace, the kindly affectionateness of brotherly love. Yet wait awhile, and you shall see whether it is not really in accordance with *His* character and counsel, whose will is to have all men to be saved, but whose sorrowful knowledge declares to us that few go in at the strait gate, while many walk on the way that leadeth to destruction.

It is, you see, only of a Christian, that the saying of Micah, repeated by our LORD, holds true; and he is not a foe to his fellows in the house, but they are foes to him. They, because they do not believe in CHRIST, are against him, because he does so believe. They, indulging their lusts and passions, rend themselves from him who feels that, as a Christian, he must not give way to these. They, seeking their own, cannot endure to be told by him, that the charity of God "seeketh not her own."¹ They, following the line which pleases them, have no patience with him—a man who lives by rule. They, trying

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

to be satisfied with this present evil world, are secretly jealous of one who has laid hold of the world to come. They, sinning more and more, hate him because he, in his holy zeal, hates sin. They are troubled by the silent rebuke of his good example, so they count him "one that troubleth Israel."¹

Look at it from the Christian's point of view. He wishes to escape, with all he loves, from Sodom, but in his entreaties and his reproofs, he seemeth as one that mocketh; he desires them to join him in the service of God, but they take no delight in His worship or His work; they have no diligence for Scripture study—no care for the Truth of CHRIST—no wish for the strength of His SPIRIT. Or they even set themselves against these things—they dissuade him from the laying on of hands—hinder his approach to the Holy Communion—laugh to scorn the notion of religious exercises in the family. Then too the general tone is so low—the daily aim so thoroughly worldly—the pervading standard never higher than the courtesy of a good-natured Esau. Even if the servant of God has not to vex his righteous soul from day to day with their ungodly deeds, he is at least being constantly pained by their want of earnestness, their lack of principle, the absence, in them, of that single eye which looks upward, and guides the life onward to God. And now we can see how all this is a trial to such a one. First, he is

¹ See Dr. Pusey's Note on Micah i. c.

distressed by this plain disregard of Him, Whom he is striving to honour and obey—the LORD Almighty, to Whom they, as well as he, owe all things, and Whose merciful works, for soul and body, have been so marvellous that they ought always to be had in remembrance. Fearful is it indeed, that man, created in that glorious Image, redeemed by that precious Blood, inhabited by that HOLY SPIRIT, should live in increasing forgetfulness of these priceless benefits. No wonder that a true child of God should be grieved by noticing this in others, and those others his own! For next, because of this intimacy, he must sorrow for them—feel greatly afraid for them—yearn for their better mind—long to see some change in their life and conversation—wish to be, in some sort, a helper to them. For are they not, with all their faults, specially beloved by him? He cannot give up his “natural affection”—it would even be a sin to do so;¹ he cannot put away the thought that they are his flesh and blood; he recollects how many interests, pleasures, cares, reminiscences, hopes, they have in common; their very faces—the very sound of their voice—must still be dear to him. And then further, because they do belong to him, is not this in itself a reason why they should dwell together in unity? The peace of the household is one part of the duty of a Christian. “God hath called us to peace,” writes the Apostle in a passage bearing on

¹ Rom. i. 81.

these home-relationships.¹ Can we mar this concord, by protesting and rebuking, and walking on different paths, and keeping up no fellowship in higher matters? The question is answered for us by one other consideration, which completes the trial. Jesus Himself puts it before us: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."² But then, when once we see that what is a trial may become a temptation, when we see that there is a real danger of our sinking to a lower level, the next words of our Lord gain their proper weight and meaning for us: "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me." For this very conflict between our affection and our Christian duty—this struggle between our inclination for the home below and our desire for the Home in Heaven—may be and often is the peculiar cross which we have to carry, and which we must carry alone. In spiritual things it is still as true now as in the days of the prophet Micah, though happily there are many instances in which God "maketh men to be of one mind in an house"—it is still as true, wherever the Christian finds no support in that which concerns his soul, that he must not "trust in a friend," or put "confidence in a guide," though that guide be one to whom in common matters he is thoroughly used—and that he

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 15.

² S. Matth. x. 37.

must keep the doors of his mouth from her that lieth in his bosom. "For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: a man's enemies are the men of his own house."¹ The most dangerous elements of the worldly spirit are those which are nearest to us—the strongest soldiers of the alien army are often those who lodge under our own roof. Truly we must be on our guard.

Yet let us recollect that we must not on this account go away into solitude, leaving the post of duty and of peril, for then must we needs go out of the world. Still less must such a separation be thought of as that which parts man and wife. In that chapter (already alluded to) of the first epistle to the Corinthians, it is the *heathen* husband or wife, of whose separation from the Christian wife or husband S. Paul is speaking. He knows of none between Christian and Christian; or if he alludes to such as having taken place, it is in order to counsel them to be reconciled again. As the son, however estranged, is still a son to his father, as the wife, however incongruous in temper or habit, is still her husband's wife, so in this world of probation—this world where there is always hope of amendment even in the worst—the Christian must not become an enemy to his familiar friends. Where then is the remedy?

1. First, doubtless, in realizing a Greater Pre-

¹ Micah vii. 5, 6.

sence, a Refuge not only more sure than our dearest on earth, but absolutely unfailing, a perfect, everlasting Defence. As the man of God says, despairing for himself and for all the faithful of any help in man, "I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me;"¹ towards Him we must *look*, when otherwise our eyes might be drawn down by human lights and patterns; for Him we must *wait*, though it seems as if we could not endure by reason of these beloved yet treacherous voices; to Him we must speak, because apart from Him there is a lack of complete sympathy in our highest wishes and our hardest struggles. We know that at least in Him we have grace, acceptance, salvation, quiet rest, eternal life. What an all-sufficient stay when we are left quite alone in our Christian service? The sinking heart beats steadily again, for the Quickening Spirit has touched it.

2. And then, this very communion with God will encourage you, as strengthened yourself, to try and strengthen your brethren. You will remember that it was only through your nearness to the High and Holy One that you were lifted up from your former unworthiness, and so, that the higher your own standard, the better hope there is of raising those you love.

3. For next, this higher life is of course God's

¹ Micah vii. 7.

gift, God's actual witness in yourself; and it would be utter unbelief to fancy that it will not at last prevail over contradiction, and win some of those who love you to a like spirit of devotion through a like precious faith. We cannot indeed say, with our partial knowledge, whether we shall convert husband or wife, friend or neighbour, by our fearless labours for God; but we can see what the lives of the saints have been to others once rebellious, and our own heart tells us what blessings we ourselves have received from them, because they were not ashamed to confess CHRIST before men, and to walk even with strictness and severity.

4. And therefore, further, so far from giving up Christian practices, be more intent on them. Beware of conformity to the world in its habits and modes of life. It is the Church, not the world, which helps you heavenward—so by that, not by this, must you be guided. Keep with the Church, and you will never deny the Head of the Church; keep with the world, and the world, since it hates Him, will put Him as much as possible out of sight. It is a positive fact, that it is often not the fashion to say grace at meals; but a Christian child will teach you better by its simple example, and you will learn to eat and drink to the glory of God, giving Him thanks. So, in small matters as in great, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” and show that you really fear God by serving Him, and

that you truly love Him by denying yourself for His sake.

5. Only, let your religion be attractive, nor repulsive, to others. Think of the glorious self-sacrifice of Henry Martyn, and imitate it even (if need be) to his brave and lonely death; but remember (not as censuring him, but as admonishing yourself,) how much more he might have accomplished had he conquered his gloomy habit of morbid self-introspection, and learnt to sympathise as well as to teach.¹ Never surrender a position of duty to please your best friend; never neglect a rule, whether of abstinence, prayer, or study, which you have set yourself for the LORD, in order to win, as you think, those who stand aloof from the work of the Christian Church. It is consistency, not compromise, which will win them—steadfastness in what is right, not shifting about for expediency. But, on the other hand, be cheerful in your conduct—be ready at the call of charity to some sick body or some troubled soul, to forego your sacrifice of worship, offering instead the sacrifice of self; so shall it be seen that you are not the slave of rules, but the servant of God, and that if you do follow them, it is only that you may the better serve Him.

6. And finally, whether you gain others over or not, your own course is clear, your own reward as-

¹ See what is stated as to this noble-hearted Missionary in that very helpful book "Under His Banner," p. 24.

sured to you. In all this prophecy of division and estrangement there is a deep undertone which speaks of the sufferings of CHRIST your LORD, and exhorts you in Him to persevere, whatever be the hindrances and enmities near or far. As CHRIST your LORD "won His way to victory through the contradiction of sinners and strife, so must those who come after Him." As His very brethren did not believe in Him, so must we be prepared to meet with scorn and rebuke from those who are our kinsmen according to the flesh—much more, with coldness and indifference from those who on points of human science or family interest are bound up most closely with us. But in that other world, if, through patience we shall have possessed our souls, there will be a final separation, which even we who once dearly loved the lost shall acquiesce in, because we then shall know, after we have failed to save them, that none can be for ever lovable except those who heartily love God.

XVI.

LONELINESS AND ISOLATION.

PSALM CXLII. 4.

"I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me : refuge failed me ; no man cared for my soul."

THE unworthy lives of those who should be our best Christian helpers, as they are our nearest earthly relations, must often, as we have seen, be a source of sorrow and disappointment to us. Often too, when those we have loved in the flesh, those with whom we have had so much in common, even in the higher region of the mind, have been taken from us, the retrospect of their characters, as they were, and the contemplation of their spirits now that they are out of the body, is a dreary and almost hopeless one. But there is a still closer and more personal grief, which at first sight indeed may seem only selfish, though in truth its burden and its exercise may issue, after a while, in blessings to the soul itself and to those around it, and in the furtherance of the glory of God. How frequently it happens, that, whether we are left actually to ourselves or not, whether we

have any companions or none, the sense of loneliness is borne in upon us with a weight which would be intolerable except for the Cross of CHRIST, the Love of our FATHER, and the Grace of His SPIRIT! And this trial which I speak of is not one necessarily connected with widowhood, grievous though this is, and utterly heart-scathing; for the consolations of that desolate state are very many, in proportion to its distresses, and married persons are often as desolate in heart: nor is it so much that of the childless, albeit man realises therein, so to say, the cutting off of his life; for unto him God gives "in His House a place and a name better than of sons and daughters."¹ nor is it even that of those who would be counted by the world devoid of friends; since many of these have such joy and peace as the world, with all its society, can never give. Rather is it the trial of a soul lonely in the crowd, honoured it may be, or it may be despised, but unmoved by any such regard, feeling itself engaged amid mustered hosts, yet knowing that it must, in a manner, fight by itself, cheered oftentimes by wife or family, but again and again withdrawing into that solitary chamber of the heart where none can enter, gladdening others with true words of faith and hope, yet saddened secretly itself in the absorbing, careful, perilous battle with the problems of life.

Experience has taught some of us what this isolation is; and as others must pass through it in a

¹ Isa. lvi. 5.

little while, it may be well for us to dwell upon it briefly, both as a fact which concerns us, and as a trouble which may prove, through God's mercy, a wholesome gift from Him.

1. Now first we learn, that the great wrestlings of the Christian must be wrought out in loneliness. Others indeed can aid us in preparing for the spiritual combat; others can instruct, advise, warn, encourage us; others can bid us rise up again when we fall, persevere when we are fainting, watch against sudden surprises; others can tell us how they themselves have been able to prevail in the same contest which is proving us; others can go with us to the very entrance of the dangerous pass, and even fight side by side with us against some other foe in the army opposed to us. But in the strife itself, after all, we must stand alone; alone face to face we must grapple with the enemy; alone, when beaten down even to our knees, though now in a greater strength than man's or than our own, we must finish our struggle. The agony of repentance, the terrible communings with God, while He seems as yet far off, silent, and angry, the bitter schooling of ourselves into submission to His will, the long hours in which, for His sake, we hold out against temptation, the time of weary suspense in waiting for His voice or watching for some sign from Him, the pain and grief through which at last we reach some act of great self-sacrifice for Him—what are all these but

instances well known to those who are in earnest, of the countless labours and sufferings which we must meet and bear alone? Nay, do you not even feel, that in order to meet and bear them rightly, you must make yourself alone, going aside from usual occupations and familiar faces, that so there may be nothing between your soul and God, or at least, closing your eyes and ears to the sights and sounds around, so as to give your undivided, undistracted self to this one thing, this lonely work which is bound up, as conscience tells us, with the happiness of eternity? Yet scarcely the less, such is our poor human nature, do we shrink from this solitariness. Even as we go forth by ourselves into the darkness, the horror of it passes over us, and like our Blessed Lord, Who bent to share our very fears, we crave for some to tarry there and watch with us.

2. But again, as our hearts are tried by the toil and peril and difficulty of the warfare, so does it often require much steadfast bravery to lift our voice for the truth, and to acknowledge with humility and still with firmness, the full faith of CHRIST crucified. Before there is any battle, and when most persons would maintain peace on any terms rather than quit themselves like men in defence of that which they believe, the upholding of the standard of the cross is often left to the solitary courageousness of a Christian. He knows that he, come what may, must confess his LORD; and so he stands forth manfully

cherishing that which he has received to hold, "the faith once delivered to the saints,"¹ the form of sound words which he has learnt and has been assured of, the Holy Scriptures which have the witness of God, and the Church which has the promise of His Presence. As the clear note of a solitary trumpet has often sounded the alarm of war, as the plain call of one far-sighted man has once and again prepared a people for impending peril, as the unshaken decision of a single bishop has ere now saved the vital doctrine of CHRIST, so, however insignificant we may be of ourselves, it is our duty to speak fearlessly on behalf of that faith, which comes to us attested by that one and the self-same SPIRIT of the Word and of the Church. To say indeed, that our own private judgment leads us to stand forth in the midst and proclaim such and such a tenet as an article of the faith, is a mark of pride rather than of grace; and we are sometimes apt to make martyrs of ourselves, (so presumptuously do we use that honourable name,) in our obstinate adherence to one-sided views of Holy Writ, or to the opinions of well-meaning but mistaken men. But this is very different from that sober Christian courage, which enables one, naturally timid, to be "bold as a lion" when God's truth is called in question, or when scoffing unbelievers try to scatter the faithful by their own groundless assertions. Then it is, that the sincerity of our love is

¹ S. Jude 3.

proved, and we are tried, not only in the sight of God but even in the sight of unbelievers themselves, whether our belief can stand the strain of single-handed testimony as against the unconverted world. There is hardly any grander picture in the whole History of God's dealings than Enoch, alone amid the throng of sceptics and ungodly of his day: and yet surely there is nothing so difficult for us to work out in our own real life, as unsupported faithfulness like his who walked with God. How many admire, how few imitate, the resolution of the deserted Psalmist, who "will not be afraid for ten thousands of the people, that have set themselves against" him "round about!"¹

3. But take the example mentioned even now. We regard, not so much the preaching of Enoch, not so much his vigorous defence of what had been commanded and revealed, as his consistent, unswervingly-consistent life. Enoch walked with God, and that simple record, coupled with our knowledge of the growing corruption of mankind, speaks volumes to us of the lonely heroism of that glorious saint, and of the deathless blessedness which was granted to him, because he chose to be with God when the whole world was against God. Such truly, in its measure, must all real *Christian* greatness be; indeed when we weigh the grace of the Gospel beside the grace of the Patriarchal religion, we must own that, since we

¹ Ps. iii. 6.

have such over-abounding privileges, none of us can be great, unless he is content to be alone with God whatever happens. And though if I told you, that even in this world, a man who would be great must often be lonely, you might answer that you neither expect nor wish to be among the great ones of the earth, yet *spiritual* excellence, high praise from God, special nearness to His Throne, must surely be the aim and desire of every sincere Christian; and for this, infinitely more than for the other, isolation, in the right sense of the word, is nothing less than a necessity. You cannot get near to God unless, at His bidding, you go aside to reason with Him, and to learn of Him, and to be strengthened by Him. You cannot see His Face (for with Him here below "we walk by faith and not by sight,"¹) unless you close your eyes to the surroundings of the world, and move on daily in steady obedience to His Voice. Vain words, base patterns, threats of violence, warnings against over-much righteousness, hypocritical blamings of formality—these are the stumbling-blocks on your path; and it is only by keeping fast hold of the hand of God and committing yourself wholly to Him, that you can come safe through. If we would preserve holy habits and follow religious rules, we must not be afraid of being alone. And assuredly it is no easy matter to rise above this fear. It is not easy to set apart hours or even minutes for

¹ 2 Cor. v. 7.

Christian exercises ; not easy to keep to a plan of Scripture reading when perhaps no one else in our house does so ; not easy to honour the fasting days of the Church when most of our neighbours think it foolishness ; not easy, during the season of Lent, to abstain from usual pleasures, in order to give to the poor our saved expenses, to God our time redeemed, or to attend more frequently the House of Prayer at the cost of our own convenience, when hardly any that we know are willing to make those sacrifices with us ; not easy to do the charitable work of pure religion when we are required to finish it by ourselves. And the trial is so subtle, is it not ? There are such plausible arguments for our conforming to this world, such easy excuses ready for ourselves, when we go for just a few steps along the broad and deadly way. One seems to be rebuking those who are older and better than oneself, or to be setting oneself up as an example for others, or to be straining at little rules, as if they were all-important, or to be in danger of scrupulousness, through the promptings of a tender conscience.

Yet all the while, my friends, there is ringing out in unmistakable tones the stern unyielding exhortation of God : " Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the LORD."¹ How shall we train our hearts and bodies to obey ? how shall we, who wish to serve Him, encourage one another so that

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 17.

our faith fail not under this trial of lonely patience and service?

(1.) First, as in all trials of the Christian life, by looking unto Him Who is alike the Quickener of this life and the Finisher of that faith. We accompany Him through all the stages of His awful pilgrimage, but He leaves us outside the garden, and takes with Him His more intimate disciples. A little further, and He leaves them also, and takes with Him Peter, James, and John. But there is a still more lonely place for Him, and, though He wished for watchers, a darkness and a sorrow more utterly for Himself. "I have trodden the winepress *alone*, and of the people there was none with Me."¹

(2.) In the light of that marvellous example consider also the Saints of old—such as him we spoke of before, the true-hearted solitary, by faith beholding the invisible yet coming LORD—or Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, yet clinging to his integrity, in the fear of GOD—or Elijah, the one prophet left among the idolaters, and courageously fronting them all—or S. John the Baptist, denouncing vice in a multitude—or Daniel, humbling his soul with fasting, sustaining his faith by prayer, and fearing neither the wrath of the king nor the fury of the lions. And as those who looked forward to the Day of CHRIST were supported in their trials of loneliness, so must we be who remember it, and

¹ Isa. lxiii. 3.

who see its wonderful power after eighteen hundred years. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master,"¹ and surely it is a privilege beyond all price, that such as we should, after all, be admitted to the shadows of Gethsemane, and to the fellowship, even in some faint measure, of His sufferings in the Bloody Sweat.

(3.) But we have far greater help even than this; for we are absolutely joined to CHRIST: and therefore the loneliness, however dreary and depressing, has but reference to man and to man's sympathy. The members of the LORD have in Him ever fresh springs of peace, and trust, and joy; from His love nothing—not even death, when we shall be most alone—can separate us: from His strength our weakness is not parted—for how otherwise could His strength be made perfect *in* our weakness? His SPIRIT, abiding with us, even in our very bodies, to the end, proves our communion with Him; His FATHER, if we will but keep His commandments, comes to us with Him, and They make Their abode with us.²

(4.) Thus joined to Him, we have a bond of brotherhood also with that great multitude which no man can number, the unseen hosts whose prayers and praises ascend even now with ours, as we go into the secret chamber to be among them, the one army of those many scattered bands which a single

¹ S. Matth. x. 25.

² S. John xiv. 23.

trumpet-call shall bring together in a moment. Yes! that Holy Communion, the first object of which is to unite us to the Sacrifice and Life of our Blessed Lord, enables us also to have mystical union with His Church; and realizing our fellowship with that blessed company, we need be no longer cast down, no longer afraid when engaged on our own individual work for God, or separated from all others in the personal afflictions of the prisoners of JESUS CHRIST.

(5.) And the very earnestness with which, as quite alone, we fulfil those tasks and bear those bonds, will prove a blessing to those who, with scorn at first, with reverence later, may be watching us. And in *their* hearts too there will be created, by the Spirit of ghostly strength, a purpose of devotion to the SAVIOUR, and a willingness to go forth with Him even into the desert, where all human footsteps fail us, to learn of Him and to share His labours. So shall our steadfastness have turned our brethren from their indifference and cowardice, and led their feet into the way of peace. From others too, those points of doctrine and belief which we have fearlessly put forth when none stood by us, and when many were against us, will win assent in the end, and readiness to uphold them manfully.

Think of such helps as these, my friends, and go forward resolutely, whether there be few or many with you; very soon the path is easier, when we are

approaching heaven ; and the solitary place, which seemed like a wilderness, grows bright with a Presence fairer than that of the children of men. Then the soul is brought out of prison, and is filled with the praise of God ; and He deals bountifully with it, and the righteous compass it about, and the LORD Himself becomes its Refuge and its Portion in the land of the living, because it had the courage and the patience to carry the burden and to endure the bondage alone, and alone to fight for Jesus and His Truth.

XVII.

DRYNESS OF SPIRIT.

PSALM LXIII. 1, 2.

"My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is ; to see Thy Power and Thy Glory, so as I have seen them in the sanctuary."

THIS Psalm of David, conceived when he was in the wilderness of Judah, expresses for us Christians in our seasons of separation and dejection, somewhat of that same sorrow which he felt through being cut off for a while from the sacred Temple, and the precious Ark, and the Cloud of glory, and the Mighty Power present in the Holy Place. For though God's House and God's Altar are within our reach, the glory seems, at times, departed from us, and the Power no longer, as in happier days, put forth to heal and comfort and invigorate us. Then, surely, as all will say who have felt it, we suffer a far heavier trial than that which we were last considering. We can bear the sense of loneliness, because of our "Emmanuel, God with us." But what if in our very intercourse with God there seems little

consolation? What if, after all His promises and bestowals, after all our prayers and communions, we find ourselves alone, with no voice that we can hear, nor any to answer, nor any that regardeth? How shall we then order our souls? This is, of course, no fanciful supposition: nor, if we acknowledge its reality, need we think that it is only so for such imperfect and unworthy Christians as most of us are. "I never yet found," says the great à Kempis, "a man so holy and devout, as not to have experienced some diminution of grace, and some occasional loss of spiritual fervour: and from this severe trial, no saint, at some period or other, has been exempt."¹ But because it is so common on that very account ought we to think of it, partly that we may understand its cause, partly that we may learn, I will not say its cure, since it is itself a medicine, but the way in which it may become a blessing to us rather than a curse, a searching remedy instead of a poison through misuse.

Those of us who, notwithstanding our unworthiness and imperfection, are at least in earnest about our souls, know too well what this spiritual dryness is—this sense of a Presence and a Glory past away. Yesterday and the day before, His Lamp shone upon your head: to-day though you look up, the very canopy of heaven is dark. Then, He Himself was close to you, and you were upheld amid all scorn

¹ "The Imitation of CHRIST," Bk. ii., ch. ix. 7.

and danger and desertion and bereavement: now, your Beloved has withdrawn Himself, and you feel, over and above those other ills, forsaken of God. You join in holy chant and psalm, but you cannot lift up your heart unto the Lord. You read His Holy Word, but it is more like the study of a dead language than that of a living Book, a quickening Death, a Divine Life, such as you used to find it. You go to the Altar of God, but you do not meet Him there as the God of your joy and gladness. You give yourself, as by a formal rule, to prayer, but the prayer ascends not now, as your vital breath, only as the utterance of another, repeated by your lips. You try to think of God as the all-satisfying Object of your faith and love and worship, but your meditation is dry and cold, and though you feel after Him, you fail to find Him, and the old foes rise up and tempt you saying, "Where is now your God?" "Sometimes," says S. Francis de Sales, "you will find yourself so absolutely destitute of all feeling of devotion, that your soul will seem to you to be a fruitless, barren desert, in which there is no trace of a pathway to find her God, nor any water of grace to refresh her, because of the dryness which seems to lay her entirely waste."¹ And the same pious writer goes on to advise us to examine the source whence this evil comes, "for we ourselves," he adds, "are often the cause of it."

¹ The Devout Life, Pt. iv., ch. 14.

1. Now, first, in our enjoyment even of spiritual gifts we are too apt to forget the SPIRIT which gave them to us ; and then spiritual pride engenders spiritual depression, for he who leans on the strength of his own supposed excellence must, sooner or later, be cast down, as not seeking to be mighty through God. There is a vast difference between thinking we stand, and blessing God for having hitherto held us up, between counting ourselves pure, and clinging gladly to the purity of the HOLY GHOST which dwelleth in us, between confidence in our personal faith, and sober thought about the measure of faith for which we shall have to answer. It is just that self-elation, that self-esteem, that self-trust, which goes before a fall ; and the higher God raises us, the greater, in proportion, becomes the danger of imagining that we have raised ourselves. And so, in His Love, lest we should be thrust down, as the presumptuous angel was, from Heaven, God takes from us, for a space, those very refreshments of His grace and power, which He meant for our health, but which we began to turn into an occasion of falling. He leaves us to walk alone, apart from the everlasting Arms, and without the guiding Eye, and uncheered by the glorious Voice, and longing in vain for that ready Ear, that sympathising Heart ; and then we understand the dreariness of life, and its unquenchable thirst, and its awful sorrow, and know that we have indeed no light in us, no sufficiency of

ourselves to help ourselves, no power of our own so much as to direct our steps. And then there is wrung from us the exceeding great and bitter cry, "How long wilt Thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy Face from me?"¹

2. Then He giveth more grace; and we go on awhile, with better cheer and with surer progress. But there comes a day, when the spiritual dryness returns upon us; "Thou hast taken me up, and cast me down."² Has not some other influence been at work, distinct from that of which we have just been speaking? It is now, not grace reckoned as merit, but grace neglected, after being valued at first. Opportunities for serving God, strength and wisdom wherewith to serve Him, means of access to Him, secret strivings of His Blessed SPIRIT, are not held out to us every day and all day, unless we try to avail ourselves of them. To use the beautiful illustration of the Bishop quoted before: "The Israelites who neglected to gather the manna betimes in the morning, could gather none after sunrise, for it was then all melted away." If, though you are a communicant, you refuse Sunday after Sunday to draw nigh and take that Holy Sacrament to your comfort, can you wonder that the consolations of God seem small to you? If, when conscience moves you to go and do some practical labours for the brethren, you wait and linger through some op-

Ps. xiii. 1.

² Ps. cii. 10.

posite inclination of your own, it is only too likely that the joyful anticipation of doing good should be replaced by a sense of uneasiness, and that quickening grace unemployed should be followed by the chill of a heart apparently void of grace. Is it this, O my soul, that has disquieted thee? Pray yet again in thy coldness and depression: "O give me the comfort of Thy help again, and stablish me with Thy free SPIRIT."¹

3. But at times it may be, that, notwithstanding all that has been done for us as Christians, through the forbearance, the bestowals, the renewings, the care of God, we have not only allowed His grace to pass by unheeded, but have even given ourselves up, in a manner utterly unworthy of our calling, to worldly pleasures and sensual appetites. In other words, sin has drawn a veil between our hearts and God. The desert of Idumæa was of our own seeking,² and yet we marvel that it should be so sandy, so hopelessly dry, so utterly unlike the fresh perennial springs of the holy mountain of my God. The world, with its deceitful mirage, its empty pleasure, must ever disappoint us, and, mercifully, the more so, the more we have learnt before the satisfying delight of spiritual things. It is not so easy then to get back into the way of peace, but God does at least graciously show us that there is no peace on that other way; and He suffers us to become ac-

¹ Ps. li. 12.

² See S. Augustine on Ps. lxi.

quainted with that state of restlessness, that oppressive silence of the soul, on purpose that we may return to hear His words and to regain His rest. Let nothing hinder us from coming back, however far we have wandered. We deserve all the weariness, and dust, and pain, and fear, and solitude of the long journey; but remember, it is the journey home.

4. Yet, while we mark these causes which are, in a manner, within our control, it would not be right to pass by one other—a very common one—to which this trial may be due—that physical weakness whereby the body reacts upon the mind. Scrupulous and anxious persons are often afraid that they are under the special displeasure of God, because they feel themselves going so heavily, low of heart and barren of high desires, when in truth it is but the mortal frame which is weak and nerveless, unequal to its own proper duties, and marring not only the elasticity of the mental powers, but also the soul's ability to pray, and read, and think. And knowing this, we shall no longer trust to feelings as anything like a sure test of our spiritual condition. These may indeed, as we have seen, be the result of negligence and of sin, and if so, may portend, except we repent, the coming judgment which shall banish peace for ever. But none of us will be saved or lost through feelings: not feelings, but belief or unbelief; not feelings, but holy deeds or evil; not feelings, but charity or uncharitableness; not feelings,

but the path we followed and the habits we formed ; not feelings, but what we did and what we were, will be the criterion at the last great day.

But here we have, as it were, a starting point whence to set out in our search for the things which may sanctify and bless this trial to us.

(a) For, first, if the earthly tabernacle, with its diseases and its infirmities, does indeed press down the soul, what a deep meaning is given to the Psalmist's troubled cry, and how thoroughly we may make it our own ! It is not " my soul " only that " thirsteth for Thee ; my flesh " also " longeth after Thee, in a dry and thirsty land." This corruptible yearneth for the Resurrection when there shall be no more weakness to retard the will, no more sickness to deaden the spirit, no more dulness of pulse to stop the upward beatings of the heart. This very body will be one day quickened into a perfect harmony with the workings and aspirations of the soul, for it will be made like unto the glorious Body of the Lord, changed through Him into a spiritual body, raised in incorruption and in power. Let our very dryness here, remind us of that prayer and hope, which carry us beyond the desert to the Land where we shall thirst no more.

(b) But next, in this world, while the trial is fully upon us, let us recollect that such a drought is the very season in which to serve God. Doubtless, it is a pleasant thing to be able to find a delight in labour-

ing for Him and in worshipping Him—but how much higher, how much more really acceptable, must be those prayers and toils, which we offer for His sake, only to please Him! how much more precious to Him must be that contrite heart, which loves Him without reference to His present consolations, waiting patiently through all the long hours of delay, and trustfully, even when He would seem to slay it! “Shall we receive good at the Hands of the LORD, and shall we not receive evil?”¹ His glory, not our satisfaction; His service, not, until He wills it, our freedom; His kingdom, not as yet our crown—must be the object of our Christian life. Surely, if such be our aim, to have a vision now and then, here and there one of His priceless gifts, once and again times of refreshing from His Presence, should suffice for us. And has He not often brightened our faith and strengthened our heart?

(c) But further, the remembrance of these past mercies does more than enable us to bear present loss of sensible comfort; it also assures us that there will be joy for us again. See how David speaks immediately after the plaintive expression of his heart's desire. “Because Thou hast been my Help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice.”² The overflowings of peace which we have had, the tokens of grace which have been granted to us, what are they to the now desolate yet penitent soul but

¹ Job ii. 10.

Ps. lxi. 7.

foretastes, never to be forgotten, of that Cup which shall run over for ever, that Holiness which in CHRIST shall be ours for ever, if we be but faithful to His call, and amid all discouragements ready to follow after Him, bearing His Cross? The believer as he travels on looks back over the scorching plains, and sees, far westward, the green line of the River of God which is full of water, and he knows that in the distant east his sinking heart, and burning lips, and wearied feet shall be gladdened and revived by its infinitely deeper, fuller stream of life, perfect and eternal.

(d) Nay more, this trial itself, as has been thoughtfully said, "may always be considered as the sign of approaching comfort: for heavenly comfort is promised to those who are *proved* by temptations"¹—"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life."²

Only let us see to it that we *are* thus proved, that we do go forward whatever be the difficulties, faint yet pursuing, worn yet patient, having nothing for our solace here, yet possessing all things through the boundless hope which centres in our SAVIOUR. Only let our eyes be as steady in their gaze towards the celestial City, though they will not weep—our tongue as serious in prayer, even if the burning fire have not kindled it into fervency—our ears as atten-

¹ "Imitation of CHRIST," Bk. ii., ch. ix. 7.

² Rev. ii. 7.

tive to the plain bidding of the word, albeit dulled to hear the sweetness of the Voice from heaven. "I sleep, but my *heart* waketh."¹ It will not be long, and some messengers will come to us from His Presence, and they will show us fountains in the dry land, footsteps of CHRIST in all lonely places, gifts from the very SPIRIT who drove us there to prove us whether we would indeed be His, marks of our FATHER's love, even where we thought Him far away. It is still, for a time perhaps, a wilderness in which we are sojourning, but it is, after all, the wilderness of Judah, and so we can praise the LORD.

¹ Cant. v. 2.

XVIII.

DARKNESS AND SUSPENSE.

2 COR. v. 7.

"We walk by faith, not by sight."

DOUBT cannot perhaps be accurately called a trial of the Christian life; for without full faith we are not thorough Christians. Yet, since many, not only baptized into the Church ere they were conscious, but also by their own choice devout worshippers, regular students, constant communicants, and obedient disciples of CHRIST, are at times afflicted by tormenting difficulties in matters of belief, it may be a work of charity to consider seriously the case of those who have to pass through this state of darkness and suspense, and to suggest in all humility and fear, yet with anxious loyalty to God, some thoughts for those who will think, some aids, if so be, for those who are willing to be aided in things which so vitally concern their souls.

It is surely a grave fault in writers on religion, either on the one hand to ignore the questionings of men, or on the other to be impatient of the answers

which they accept—either to ridicule all doubt whatsoever, or to despise people for resting satisfied with the Church's solution of their doubts. Such persons, (and they are of very various opinions,) cannot realize how heavy is the cross which minds thus shaken have to bear. Did they do so, there would be "no touch of scorn" in their treatment of such sufferers. Spiritual despondency is in a manner worse than spiritual dryness, though often connected with it. The thirsty desert would be more bearable to us, if we could behold above, not only "the body of heaven in its clearness," but also some Divine token of the Spiritual Rock. It is the darkened though rainless sky, the unrefreshing yet concealing clouds, the hiding away of God's Face, the silence of His Voice, the uncertainty about ourselves and Him, the mystery which seems to surround us on all sides—it is this which is so hard to bear. Misgivings as to the Nature of God and the Word of God and the promises of God and the strange work of God; misgivings as to our own place in His wonderful Creation, our own share in His more marvelous redemption, our own hopes for the eternal world, our own present being here—these are not troubles to be laughed at—they may become great agonies for our inward life—we must grapple with them, not indeed in our own strength or wisdom, but at least in the most real and intense earnestness possible to our will.

Now doubt, as has just been implied, takes two

special shapes—the one concerning God, the other concerning ourselves. Sometimes we are perplexed, because some one asks, as the devil asked of old, “Yea, *hath* God said?” or, with the heathen taunt, “Where is now thy God?” or, in the spirit of the Egyptian tyrant, “Who is the LORD, that I should serve Him?” or, like the sceptical Israelites, “How could God come down from above and be made man?” or, “How can there be Three Persons yet but One God?” or, “How can the Spirit of God be among us when we cannot see Him?” or, “Can CHRIST still be our LORD?” or, “Where is the promise of His coming?” Sometimes the horrible dread has reference to our own present or future condition, so that we inquire passionately, “Are we better than the beasts that perish? Can we be saved? Is there for us a higher life now—a life to come hereafter?” It is remarkable how, from time to time, the very naming of such alarms and scruples seems to scatter them like the mists under the morning sun; and doubtless many a soul which goes on brooding in secret over these apparent causes for disquietude, would find that they were but phantoms after all, if only it would try to discover proofs of them, or even words to describe them. Still there are not a few who recognise in this a very painful trial of their faith and perseverance—not a few who have the experience of walking, as it were, without light. And these, remember, are not merely those

whose characters have been so warped from God, that their very mind and conscience have been defiled, and who therefore find themselves, as they deserve to be, in darkness.¹ Have we not known, among our own best Christian friends, among the humblest servants of our LORD, whose lives have put us to the blush, some on whom these mists and shadows have been allowed for a while to fall? It may be that while we have tried to comfort such as these a store of consolation has been laid up for us against the cloudy and dark day, and that what we suggest as a remedy to others may prove useful to ourselves, in times like those approaching—times of such terrible sifting as might deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect. May God prevent us from saddening any who have not thus been saddened hitherto, and from keeping any in the darkness who are already struggling back into the light! And may He help those of us who have occasional difficulties, to be braced rather than discouraged by them, and to learn what good reason we have for the hope that is generally in us, and to be much more thankful than we are for the evidences which He has granted!

1. And first, let us recollect our LORD's answer to those who said to Him, "How long dost Thou make us to doubt? if Thou be the CHRIST, tell us plainly"—"I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in My FATHER's Name, they bear witness of

¹ Titus i. 15.

Me.”¹ Just as, independently of a written revelation, God “left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons,”² so even before those utterances of the HOLY GHOST, which in the New Testament carried on continuous testimony to JESUS CHRIST, His own thoroughly attested miracles were enough to convince men that He was what He claimed to be, the SON of GOD. But such a Brother, teaching us of such a FATHER, may make us think of this further consolation. If we have, as all the world has, except a few so-called philosophers and a certain number of grossly brutally ignorant men, a belief in God as our FATHER, can we conceive it possible that, after He had made us and placed us on the earth, He should have given us no rules or commandments, no promises or warnings to keep us in the right way? Those faithful witnesses indeed—His glorious ordinances in the heavens above, the sun, and moon, and stars—would have taught us “His eternal Power and Godhead,”³ but they would not have shown us “how to walk and to please God.” This blessed work was reserved for His Holy Scriptures, which are able to make us “wise unto salvation through faith which is in CHRIST JESUS.”⁴ If only we would read them, they would give light and understanding to our hearts—thorough guidance to our lives.

¹ S. John x. 24, 25.

² Acts xiv. 17.

³ Rom. i. 20.

⁴ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

2. But we have another "mighty monument"¹ to establish us concerning our belief, and to chase away the mists which transitory human fancies and the fever-heat of earthly excitement raise ever and anon over our onward path. We have "the Church of God, the pillar and ground of the truth,"² the kingdom of souls, founded in fulfilment of prophecy, proving itself again and again—amid apparent failure, deadly opposition from without, even frequently recurring coldness within, amid the thousand changes of empires and governments—the one only thing which is evidently a kingdom which cannot be destroyed.³ Discordant voices all around, but in the midst the same Catholic Creeds. New opinions everywhere, broached only to disappear, but, sounding through and above them all, the same plain truth once delivered to the Saints. Infidel forsakings of prayer and praise and Communion, but all the while, not ceasing for a single day, the same Eucharistic *Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto*. Calm, steadfast, majestic, confident of the final issue, the Church of CHRIST advances, gathering to her more and more of the true men and women who love and serve the One SAVIOUR, shedding from her, in her suffering, persecuted course, like the dead leaves

¹ The expression is taken from Archer Butler's noble saying about the Church Catholic and the Jewish people.

² 1 Tim. iii. 15.

³ Dan. vii. 14.

under the sweeping wind, the false-hearted members whose presence is a weakness and a scandal. Holding the Scriptures, and therefore separate from them as a second Divine witness, telling us what *is* Scripture, and therefore, in one sense, of higher value among the Divine witnesses, yet appealing to these Holy Scriptures, and therefore commending them to us as of paramount authority, the Church is a refuge to us in our perplexities, a clear light to us in our obscurity, a never-dying Mother to us in our seasons of desolation, a guide to bring us to our God when we seem to have lost sight for a while of His loving Fatherly Eye.

3. But if now and then we cannot enter into the full gladness of her fellowship, if we find ourselves still walking in a sort of haze, what, after all, is this compared with the night out of which we and all the Western nations have been brought? Behold! darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.¹ Can we even ask for a *sign*, that the LORD is risen upon us, that His glory has been seen among us? The sign is manifest to us all, if we do ask for it. What are these Hospitals—these Homes for the aged—these Infirmarys for the sick—these Ragged Schools—these Orphanages—these Penitentiaries for the fallen, but tokens of a compassionate and thoughtful love unknown among the heathen, absolute creations of CHRIST's beneficent religion, irresistible

¹ Isa. lx. 2.

beams from the One Glorious Light of the Blessed Gospel of God? Watch these works of the SPIRIT—throw yourself into them—sacrifice, in order to take part in them, your pleasure, your money, and your time;¹ and you will find an increasing witness in yourself, the ever fuller persuasion of the truth of CHRIST, of the delight of obeying Him, of the stupendous power of His grace, of the reality of His promises, and of the unspeakable joy of His approaching Presence.

4. And this practical exercising of ourselves in what is not only eminently useful but evidently good and Divine if anything is so, will have this further value for us. It will show that we are set upon the duties that are plain, whether we have less or more of the knowledge which is not plain. Here “much is to be done and little to be known,” as one of our most learned and most melancholy Englishmen said in that prayer of his which probably many of us are in the habit of using—the prayer to be delivered “from difficulties vainly curious, and doubts impos-

¹ How wonderfully, in the great City, East and West have been brought together by this readiness, in many a noble man and gentle woman, to go and minister to the fainting bodies and weary souls of the poor! Might not many more get untold blessings for themselves, if they would thus labour for the Crucified: if, for instance, instead of dining out on Friday, they would always on that day drive down to some poverty-stricken neighbourhood, and spend some hours in going about with the clergy, or as their almoners, among the needy?

sible to be solved.”¹ And though, in the sturdy Anglo-Saxon character, this feeling has sometimes degenerated into the ungodly notion, that, if only our lives are active, we need not mind about our faith, yet it will be good for us to remember that life is too short for much doubting, and scarcely long enough, when we at last wake up to its seriousness, for the necessary labours of our high calling. And with this we shall not forget, that our small measure of knowledge is not such as to leave us blind. We have light enough to walk by, so we be but faithful to it. “Plain and easy rules,” indeed, “make a sure conscience, but the doubtful and the dark must

¹ Dr. Johnson. The whole prayer is given, in the hope that it may be of lasting benefit even to one or two. “O LORD, my Maker and Protector, Who hast graciously sent me into this world to work out my salvation, enable me to drive from me all such unquiet and perplexing thoughts as may mislead or hinder me in the practice of those duties which Thou hast required. When I behold the works of Thy hands, and consider the course of Thy Providence, give me grace always to remember that Thy thoughts are not my thoughts, nor Thy ways my ways. And while it shall please Thee to continue me in this world, where much is to be done and little to be known, teach me by Thy HOLY SPIRIT to withdraw my mind from unprofitable and dangerous inquiries, from difficulties vainly curious, and doubts impossible to be solved. Let me rejoice in the light which Thou hast imparted; let me serve Thee with active zeal and humble confidence, and wait with patient expectation for the time, in which the soul which Thou receivest shall be satisfied with knowledge. Grant this, O LORD, for JESUS CHRIST's sake. Amen.”

be content with a less light."¹ The next step is before you. Take it at once, and you will be one step nearer to the perfect day.

5. But, if you refuse to take it, then it is necessary to remind you of what is too often forgotten by those who are scrupulously anxious not to act upon an incomplete faith. Doubt has actual peril in it. We may not have mathematical proof, but to turn away from what is, to all intents and purposes, sufficient evidence, would be nothing short of sin. There is an evil in not siding with the faithful—there is an evil even in suspending our judgment, (the supposed characteristic of this generation,) for, what do we expect more? what ground have we for thinking that we should be content with a little more, with much more evidence, with the very witness of our senses? It was part of the reproach which our Blessed LORD brought against His enemies, "Ye also have *seen* Me, and believe not."² And knowing this, ought we not to feel that it may be a mark of our proud self-reliance, of our lack of submission to God, to seek for that which He has not granted us, instead of considering that which He has? What can be worse than that impatience of mysteries which makes men say, as they said eight hundred years before CHRIST: "Let Him make speed, and hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the

¹ Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule of Conscience*, Bk. I. Ch. v. Rule 6.

² S. John vi. 36.

counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it.”¹ Surely there are three prayers which would become us all infinitely better, and would put us in a right attitude towards God.

“LORD! I believe all that Thou hast revealed.” This would show that there was no rebellion in our hearts, but a readiness to receive whatsoever He may have spoken, though we do not discern it all as yet.

“LORD! I believe: help Thou mine unbelief.” This would be a truthful confession of the difficulties which we still do feel at times, while yet we deliberately choose Him, His doctrine and His service.

“LORD! increase my faith.” This would humbly express our own acknowledged powerlessness to grow of ourselves out of the imparted seed, and yet our thorough desire thankfully to own that gift, as very precious to us even in its weaker condition, and, through JESUS, capable of enlargement.

These surely are acceptable petitions: two of them are in the Holy Scriptures, and the third we cannot but feel (I speak as unto Christians) to be the right mode of regarding those very Scriptures as a record from God offered freely to us. Another thought springs out of this. As “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,”² so even the passing unbelief of the saints is spoken

¹ Isa. v. 19.

² Rom. xv. 4.

of in those sacred books, to make our faith the stronger. It is written that some of the disciples doubted, so that there should be no doubting in us.¹ It is written that an apostle hesitated, so that we, hearing the Master's rebuke to him, might not be faithless, but believing.²

Such are the calls of our LORD. Let us listen to them very carefully and obey them at once—not waiting for impossibilities in this world of probation, where we walk by faith in things unseen, not by means of the appearance of the things themselves.³ It is “the invisible God” whom we serve,⁴ but our service can be very real and very loyal. It is an invisible soul which this body bears about with it, but it is only that soul which can explain the higher instincts and deeper fears and awful memories which we ourselves, in our own personal being, cannot ignore, or deny, or utterly quench. It is an unseen SAVIOUR, Whose Image you connect with the Cross of shame and the Throne of grace, but He is the One, “Whom, having not seen, ye love”—and “in Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory,

¹ S. Matth. xxviii. 17. “Dubitatum est ab illis, ne dubitaretur a nobis.” S. Leo, Serm. i. de Ascens.

² S. John xx. 27.

³ See the original of the text: διὰ πίστεως γὰρ περιπατοῦμεν, οὐ διὰ ὁρατῶν—and Alford's translation.

⁴ Col. i. 15.

receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."¹

As we labour lovingly for Him, our dread passes away: we know whom we have believed—the "LORD both of the dead and of the living"²—Who, as Christians have learnt to their comfort, will quicken even our mortal bodies by His SPIRIT that now dwelleth in us³—and Who, as the very heathen writers were constrained to own, will receive at death our souls to Himself.⁴ We know that, living or dying, we can put those souls into His hands, and that He is able to keep that which we "have committed unto Him against that day." And with that assurance there is growing for us also a better promise—the blessed expectation not merely of a sudden Resurrection to happiness, but of a gradual transformation to holiness.

¹ 1 S. Pet. i. 8.

² Rom. xiv. 9.

³ Ibid. viii. 11.

⁴ Euripides, Suppl. 533:

πνεῦμα μὲν πρὸς αἰθέρα,

τὸ σῶμα δ' εἰς γῆν.

Seneca de Scip. Afric. Epist. 87, "animam in cælum, ex quo erat, rediisse persuadeo mihi." Even Lucretius (of whom Pole says, that, though "the patriarch of the Epicureans, he was yet compelled by truth to declare,")

"Denique cœlesti sumus omnes stirpe oriundi:

Omnibus Ille idem Pater est . . .

Cedit item retro de terrâ quod fuit antè

In terras; et quod missum est ex ætheris oris

Id rursum cœli rellatum templa receptant.

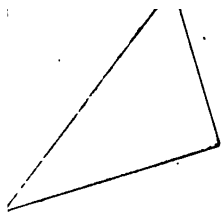
Nec sic interimit mors res ut materiali

Corpora conficiat, sed cœtum dissipat ollis."

Let *us* not cease to grasp that hope we hold of saintdom:¹ but let us, as Christians, move forward also, walking while we have the light. If we have not perfect certainty as yet, we have sufficient guidance: if we have not hitherto attained that fulness of faith which the HOLY GHOST alone can bestow, we are not utterly without Divine testimony, while three great facts, requiring some explanation, and not easily, when taken together, to be explained away, are before us—the teaching of the Scriptures, the voice of the Church, the conscientious lives of ten thousands of the saints: if we cannot count ourselves in the blessed sunshine which a little child enjoys, as he labours and prays and is merry for the short hours of the day, we have at least the moon and the stars to govern our night. As, even in that dimness, we set ourselves to imitate earnestly though imperfectly the holiest Example that was ever given to us men, His own sure word is more and more fulfilled in us: “He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”²

¹ S. Simeon Stylites.

² S. John viii. 12.



XIX.

HINDRANCES IN PRAYER.

LAM. III. 44.

"Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through."

IT is thus that the silence of the Unseen God affects the suppliant Israelite: there is neither speech nor light, so the soul fears, to satisfy its yearning cry, its darkened vision. And though to the Christian in these last days, so much better than that season of Jerusalem in her distress, there is a surer access to the Heart of Mercy, a surer pledge of final acceptance, a surer promise of the answer of peace, yet the appearance of the Heavens does often seem against us, and our ghostly enemy tries his utmost to make us despair of being heard on high. Can there be a greater, a more painful trial? As prayer is the last link which binds the doubter to his God, and yet a link so strong, that oftentimes the golden chain of faithful religion is riveted again, piece by piece, till the bond is perfected in thorough confidence and diligent love, so when the generally trust-

ful and devoted disciple is hindered in approaching to the LORD by doubts, and shadows, and misgivings, and blasphemies, the strain is heavy indeed. Then it is as if God did not hear; and perplexities are not cleared away; and the path looks very dark; and there is such a loneliness in life, and pleasure is so dreary, and society so dull, and sorrow so intolerable, and a shadow is cast across the pages of our book, and the lines of our duty, and the bright faces of our companions, and the holiest thoughts of our heart. For the best refreshment and the highest hope in all these appear to be absent from us, and we know that we cannot walk in our own fire or in the sparks which we have kindled. We need the Heavenly Voice, not merely earthly comforters—the Divine Friend, so infinitely more than any imparted sympathy—the guidance of that Eye, which can foresee the whole road, and warn us of every danger, and counsel us in every difficulty, and lead us home. But we pray for this, and as yet we receive not; we seek, and we do not immediately find; we knock with importunity, but the door is as of iron and of adamant, and we cannot open it for ourselves. Or, frightful fancies flit through our minds in the very midst of our petitions—horrible blendings of the glorious Name of God and the vile cursings of men; foul imaginations utterly alien to our constant desires: blasphemies which we cannot always trace even to our former habits of sin, and which we do not recollect having

gathered from the lips of the most profane. Or, the very service of the sanctuary is marred to us, through the confusion which haunts our soul, and the scruples which prevent us from worshipping in peace. Or, the supplications which we offer in the evening and the morning and at noon-day become a sort of trial to us, not as being irksome or tedious in themselves, but because our faith seems clouded over, and our communings with God beset with hesitation, and our spiritual sight of God no longer that of a very present Help in trouble. Or, the frequent questionings of the sceptical world, the anxious cares of our daily business, the dreams of pleasure or of ambition, arise within us, and our prayer falls back on our chilled and disquieted heart, a dead form without the wings of heavenward motion, or the life of trust through CHRIST to Godward.

And yet we feel that we *must* pray, that we must pray without ceasing, that we must watch unto prayer, that without prayer we are not living souls, that we must regain the power of prayer if we would indeed have peace and hope and joy, that we must at last be found "praying in the HOLY GHOST," if we are, as real Christians, to build up ourselves on our most holy faith.¹ And so, partly because we yearn for the comfort it bestows, partly because our heart's desire is unto the Name of Him which hath made us and redeemed us, partly because we dare not go on in

¹ S. Jude 20.

this uncertain unhappy way, we earnestly ask what we ought to do in order to draw nigh unto God for the Light of His Countenance and the answering word of His great consolation. It may be that He has, even now, some aids and encouragements for us, and that though we are in "the low dungeon"¹ still, He is not far away, but ready to remove the darkness and to loosen our chains, and to give us once more the blessed liberty of His sons and daughters, speaking freely to their FATHER and gladdened by His loving Voice.

1. And the first thought is, that the idea of prayer must be an instinct implanted in us by our Creator. As there is no nation so barbarous as not to have, if only through its hideous idols, the notion of some Being higher than itself, so is there a world-wide feeling after God, a wish in all of us, except a few philosophers, and perhaps even in these, to approach Him in some way, and to gain His blessing. And therefore, to neglect prayer because there are some difficulties about it, would be, not only to set aside all the teachings of Revelation concerning this duty and privilege, but also to reject the witness which God has placed round about us everywhere, in the up-turned faces, and responsive consciences, and humble sacrifices of the children of men. But when we read in the records of God, how thoroughly He is a God that heareth prayer, how often He urges us to con-

¹ Lam. iii. 55.

tinue in it, how prominently He puts before us the example of those saints of His who practised it, how much He commends it to us by the Pattern of Him Whom we should have thought the last Person to need it—His own Eternal Son manifest in the Flesh, and ever “holy, harmless, undefiled”¹—then assuredly we learn that what was once but an unwritten law, stored up in the heart of mankind, is written now for us in such plain characters, that we cannot help seeing them as a rule for our own daily life, bound up with our own personal salvation. If the hindrances are considerable, the duty itself is much more so. If the clouds overshadow us for a while, the attraction of the Sun which shines above them, and enlightens and warms us through them, is infinitely greater. We are drawn to God, even when He seems to repel us.

2. And so next we are taught, even by His sterner dealings with us, to continue “instant in prayer.”² He desires that we should reign with Him as princes that have overcome, and so, before our name and our nature can be ennobled, we must wrestle on in the spirit of the patriarch—the body wearied and the mind in anxiety, and the whole system almost out of joint through its cares, and fears, and struggles, but the will and the heart still resolute in their pur-

¹ Heb. vii. 26; cf. S. Matth. xxvi. 39; S. Mark i. 35; S. Luke v. 16; vi. 12; ix. 29; xxii. 44.

² Rom. xii. 12.

pose: "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."¹ Prayer, if it be faithful, is heard the more through delay; prayer, if it be persevering amid all discouragements, has the earnest of victory; prayer, if the hands are still clasped, and the face still steady, and the eyes still bent on God, will make His strength our own, His grace sufficient for us, His love more manifest to us than it has ever been. We must not heed overmuch the scruples and alarms which would make us feeble, nor the dimness which comes over us ere "the day breaketh,"² nor the mystery which infolds the Object of our worship—but we must go forward fearlessly and faithfully. Searchings of heart, awful forebodings, a sense of loneliness, the darkness deepening, the soul sinking under the pressure of its cares, the very life rent, as it were, by the conflict of hope and doubt,—may not all these, grievous though they are, tend to keep our hands and our spirits uplifted, after the example of Him Who "being in an agony, prayed more earnestly?"³

3. And as for those distracting influences which terrify us at times, those blasphemous suggestions which we dare not tell to any one, let us remember for our comfort that they are quite external to us—they are but fiery darts of the wicked, which cannot hurt us, and will not even touch us or stay with us

¹ Gen. xxxii. 26.

² Ibid.

³ S. Luke xxii. 44.

if we sign ourselves with the sign of the Cross,¹ and renounce the devil and his abominations. Let us remember, even when this trial is at its height, the everlasting difference between temptation and sin: these flying thoughts, if we let them go, can no more sully the Christian soul than the murky cloudlets which scud over the moon's bright orb, can spoil its glorious beauty. Press on quietly and hopefully, with a pure heart and the faith of a Christian, longing for greater purity and stronger faith, and as in more dangerous enticements, so in this, "resist the devil, and he will flee from you."² The very fact that we do feel and dread these blasphemies as blasphemies, may contain within it the germ of our consolation under the trial; for it may serve to show us that our faith in that God, against Whose awful sanctity such thoughts make war in defiance of our will, is after all a real and true faith. As doubting souls ere now have been driven, by their fear of unworthiness in partaking of the Eucharist, to see how

¹ The writer hopes that this will be understood, not as referring to any outward use in the common worship or intercourse of Christians—a use which the 30th Canon of the Church of England shows to be primitive, lawful, and serviceable, though many persons would now-a-days need at first special care to avoid hypocrisy therein—but as suggesting a very secret remedy for individual troubles of a peculiar sort—the remedy itself having been proved by experience, and being evidently connected with a great mystery of the supernatural world.

² S. James iv. 7.

sincerely they believe in the Godhead of Him Who is present there—that Godhead which in their anxious reasoning they had even in a manner questioned about or hesitated to accept, so have such persons found, in the terrible fancy that they may have committed the sin against the HOLY GHOST, an antidote against that lack of faith in His Divinity, which they imagined as a part of themselves, but which really was something without them, a phantom alien to their inward heart and conviction—destined, after earnest prayer and Christian work, to melt away before the Light of God like the shadow that departeth.

4. But if for a space—what seems a long space in this short sum of our years on earth—the trial should abide with you after all, recollect that past sin does really deserve this, even this heavy chastisement, and that what God desires to see in us is a deeper, fuller penitence—the secret working of a godly sorrow—the secret upgrowth of a true self-abasement for those deeds and words of evil which wrapped themselves round the roots of our earlier life and became almost a portion of our being, till that day when, in the Harvest, the outer husks of our fallen nature shall be winnowed away, and there shall remain in the Bosom of Him that bindeth up the sheaves, the wholesome grain of a soul utterly purified. And till that day, be patient, taking shame to yourself, and praising God, that though the memorial of your sin remaineth, the sin itself has been for ever purged

away. Clearness and rapture may not be granted you before the end, but He will have given you that which is, in this world and for us sinners, far better—a broken and contrite heart, which He will never despise.

5. And then should it still happen that your heart though contrite is at times very heavy, and your devotions dull, think of that excellent counsel which a master of the spiritual life has suggested to us, that “when we are incapable of the higher exercises of devotion, we should practise the lower.”¹ Offer up a short and earnest supplication to God, and then occupy yourself diligently in common duties, in charitable acts for others, in humble labours for God. Yet a little while, and the Rewarder of all faithful service will return to you, and the day of better things and of a more heavenly spirit will dawn, and the day-star arise in your heart. Pray the best prayer you can when you are in heaviness, thinking upon God; ask Him to make it better by His wonder-working grace; try through that grace to make it better still by dwelling seriously on the thought of some soul which is being lost and of your own which is scarcely saved: and little by little, the faith and charity which are of God will quicken into life and power the smouldering embers of your humble petition, and the true light will shine to meet it—the true light from Heaven beautiful in its clearness.

¹ Thomas à Kempis, Bk. iii., ch. 47.

6. And finally be assured that though your feelings are not always what you wish, yet in CHRIST your prayers are already beyond the clouds which seem so lowering—above the stars which might make you satisfied with a lesser light than His. Beyond and above, His all-prevailing Intercession has presented them within the Golden Gate, and they have entered for His sake into the ears of the LORD GOD Almighty; and you learn at last why it was that He taught you by His example and by His exhortation, “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”¹

¹ S. Luke xviii. 1.

XX.

OUR PRESENT IGNORANCE.

ECCLIES. VII. 23.

"I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me."

NEXT to the bitterness of his own impurity—a bitterness worse than death¹—Solomon's greatest sorrow was the sense of the little knowledge to be attained in this life. How wonderful, that the wisest of the philosophers of God should make such a confession (not in the darkness of sin, but in the light of a penitent old age) of the ignorance of man, by owning how little he could himself find out, with all his gifts, all his observation, and all his research! And now, after three thousand years more of experience and experiment, notwithstanding our boasted grasp of exact science and of physical facts, must we not still repeat the words of the Preacher, and feel that, the further we advance, the less we can dare to think of ourselves, as compared with Him Whose understanding has no limits? Every secret disclosed seems to prove to us our normal ignorance; every

¹ See ver. 26.

law of nature, as it is defined for us, reminds us how hardly we can even guess at the higher laws which God is using all our days, in His own continuous eternity; every effect we notice in the things that are before us only serves to quicken our desire to know those things themselves, "the Author, the cause, and the end of them."¹

And though of course to Christians, taught of God, it is enough, as has been said, to have faith, without sight, in all matters of the spiritual world, it is only natural that on this earth, they too, having, in greater or less degree, the inclination and the power "to search and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things,"² and the reference which the different parts have to each other, and the way in which God governs us all, should come back again and again disheartened from the inquiry, certain only of this, that such knowledge "is far off, and exceeding deep." What vexation to a heart that applies itself to this, to a mind that would fain traverse with reverence all the work of God, to be convinced "that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun; because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea, further, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it."³

It is not surely rebellious to say, that this does

¹ Bishop Butler, "On the Ignorance of Man."

² Eccles. vii. 25.

³ Eccles. viii. 16, 17.

constitute one of our trials, even in the Church. For our Churchmanship does not stifle thought, or stop investigation. Our minds need training, widening, deepening, to be fit companions for our souls, which are gaining, through the influence of the SPIRIT, increasing measures of wisdom, love, and holiness, and for our bodies, which He is enabling to become sober, temperate, and chaste. Catholic doctrine indeed is unchangeable: but shall there be no progress in the Church of CHRIST? Let us answer with Vincent de Lerins: "There shall be progress, and even great progress; for who would be so envious of the good of men, or so cursed of God, as to prevent it? . . . with the growth of the ages and centuries there must necessarily be a growth of intelligence, of wisdom, and of knowledge, for each man as for all the Church."¹ And so the seekers are not all sceptics, nor all the reasoners rationalists. The learned Paul is the prisoner of JESUS CHRIST; and the accomplished Luke is also the beloved physician, the accurate and consoling Evangelist for persons spiritually diseased; and in our times, too, the profoundest thinkers are often the truest defenders of the faith, the humblest servants of the LORD. In the fellowship of such men many of us like to tread in difficult paths, and to ask ourselves hard questions. But it not unfrequently happens that the paths prove too difficult, and the questions too hard for us;² and we

¹ "Commonitorium Peregrini," c. 136. ² 2 S. Pet. iii. 15, 16.

get puzzled and perplexed, and are obliged to come down again to lower ground, where we are not dizzy, and to the air of common Christian life which we can freely breathe, and to those simple duties of our religion which we can thoroughly comprehend, and in which we can do, without misgiving, the will of God.

Yet we do not like this discovery of our weakness, and take long to learn that lesson of humility which consists in saying from one's heart, "I know nothing yet as I ought to know." It tries our patience to be baffled so often in our cravings for truth, to have to look upon ourselves as children picking up little shells when we would be moving the very rocks, to wait for months and years ere the light breaks in upon us. It tries our stability to come upon "things hard to be understood" in the Holy Scripture, and to be content to leave them quietly for the present unexplained, with the belief that they have an explanation which would remove our anxious thoughts. It tries our confidence towards God, to be told that within that concealing veil He is working in marvellous order, while we are disturbed by some half-seen portions of His mighty operation. It tries our acquiescence in the nature He has graciously given us, to be constrained to expect mysteries in this lower world, and to rest satisfied with less evidence than He might have granted. Above all, it tries our love of Him and of His boundless perfections, to be re-

minded that there is a more excellent way even than that of understanding all mysteries and all knowledge¹—a way which is full of peace, though we walk thereon with plain wayfaring men.

Like all trials, therefore, this has its blessings; and how great these are we may see in a moment, as we merely name these graces of the HOLY GHOST. But it may help us to mark more fully some of the consolations which are offered to us, as to those who have fellowship with God and with His SON.

1. In one sense we “know all things;”² for we “have an unction from the Holy One.” We have the SPIRIT of CHRIST, for we are joined to Him the Anointed of the LORD, in Whom “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”³ That assurance does not indeed convey to us the notion that we require no human education; but it does put us in remembrance, that if we belong to Him, we are capable of being thoroughly enlightened, and that if we cherish the trust committed to us, the Divine Guide Who dwelleth in us, all things that pertain to life and godliness shall be ours. These are the things which we really need; and then the wonderful works of God, within, around, above us, shall be revealed to us sufficiently for us to praise and bless Him. Earth is but the ante-chamber to the Heavenly Pre-

¹ 1 Cor. xiii.

² 1 S. John ii. 20.

³ Col. ii. 3.

sence, and the little glimpses we gain of the inner Light, the few sounds we hear of His glorious teaching, are enough to convince us, that those who serve Him truly here, shall know Him fully hereafter. The small seed is but the beginning of the complete plant, yet it has the complete plant within itself. The humble, thorough acceptance of CHRIST and of His Cross, is the germ of that boundless knowledge which shall satisfy us for ever and ever.

2. And, meanwhile, it is certainly a part of God's goodness that He suffers us to go on in ignorance of countless matters. We recognize that, in the mercy which hides from us, till just before one awful turn in the road, those great afflictions, which, if we could anticipate them from the first, would make our whole journey utterly miserable. Must we not believe that in other points it is just the same, and that God spares our eyes and our understanding, by withholding from us some of His beams of light? He had other work to be done in the world, before He would raise up a Newton or a Galileo. There was to be a preparation, a time of aching want and ignorance, a season blest by prophecy and waiting and prayer, ere He would send His CHRIST. Surely there is some similar design in the time to come. The existence of Mahometanism, the divisions of Christendom, the unity of the Jews, the continuance, all through these years of grace, of idolatrous religions—all these

which appear such strange problems to us now, have purposes for the future, lovingly hidden from us, to test our faith and to make us watch for a working independent of ourselves. If it were only to humble us, how gracious would be this dispensation.

3. For next, we are not the crown of things—not the highest beings: our body tells us *that*—our body with its inherent corruptions, its undeniable defilements—joined, it is true, to a nobler self and so lifting us erect above the beasts that perish—yet still keeping us down below the level which we feel we could attain to, were we without the body—far below those spiritual creatures, whom we can at least conceive of, by the comparison of that higher and lower self in our own nature, contrasted with the merely animal life of the brute—immeasurably below that Creator Spirit, Which, if we believe in Him at all, we must believe to be without body, parts, or passions, the All-Wise, Eternal God. His wisdom only is infinite, and He makes us learn our place by giving us limited powers, not for the formation of a Babel tower, but for the building up of ourselves into a spiritual temple for His service, in which all the worship should proclaim the gifts of God, not the intellect of man.

4. For “Religion consists” (as Bishop Butler so thoughtfully reminds us¹) “in submission to the will

¹ Sermon “On the Ignorance of Man.”

of God:" and so our condition in this world is a school of exercise for this temper: and we are taught this essential truth, not only by the temptations, difficulties, and afflictions through which we pass, but also by our very ignorance. We learn to bend to Him, because the future is so entirely in His Hands, and the events of the present moment so utterly unforeseen by us, and the things which surround us so strange, except to Him. The ignorance of man forces him to throw himself on the loving-kindness, the perfect wisdom, of Almighty God. Our ignorance places us upon our knees, that we may pray for enlightenment: and then sets us on active feet, that, doing His will, we may know of the doctrine: and then puts us in a posture of trustful expectation, that so we may appreciate all real evidence, remembering that we cannot look for positive proof.

5. And once more, let us use the faculties which God has intrusted to us, without complaining that He has kept others from us. "If," (to use the illustration of the same great writer,) "a man were to walk by twilight, must he not follow his eyes as much as if it were broad day and clear sunshine?" Much more, in things which concern our souls, must we thankfully avail ourselves of all the helps divinely offered, even though they are not all that we could wish. "What is it to us, whether the knowledge He gives us be greater or less, if it be He Who gives it?

What is it to us, whether it be exact or vague, if He bids us trust it?"¹ There is light enough to guide us in our duty to-day—light enough to make us repent of yesterday's sins,—light enough to show us the great and perhaps deadly peril of planning evil for to-morrow. "This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it."² "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but the things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."³ In that diligent obedience, that practical confidence, that occupied quietness shall be our strength: so waiting, trusting, labouring, let us look forward to the time when the eye shall be satisfied with seeing; and the ear filled with hearing—when we shall no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face—when we shall know, not in part, but even as also we are known.⁴ And let us pray, amid all wavering and

¹ Newman's "University Sermons," p. 351.

² Deut. xxx. 11—14.

³ Deut. xxix. 29.

⁴ 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 12.

dimness for that which is indeed "precious faith"¹—the faith so dear to the little child, so priceless to the humbled man, the gift which multiplies itself in grace and peace, "through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our LORD."

¹ 2 S. Pet. i. 1, 2.

XXI.

PERPLEXITIES OF CONSCIENCE.

PSALM XIII. 1, 2.

*"How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long shall I
take counsel in my soul?"*

AS we lift up our soul unto God in prayer, He shows us the way that we should walk in. Yet He is not a Visible Guide; and, practically, we have to choose by ourselves every day, how we should act. Countless cases arise continually, in which we must do or leave undone, take this or that path, speak or refrain from speaking, go with those companions or with these, accept or refuse a responsibility, a risk, a work, steer a course between two dangers, one of which seems clearly the greater, the other possibly the more subtle, decide on the present use of our time, or the right use of our money, or the best use of our strength. And then, besides, there are many enemies troubling us, and adding to the difficulties which beset our minds and which hinder our progress. And there are those whom we do not and cannot reckon among our enemies,—good men, whose judgment and habits and desires are very different from

ours, and whom sometimes we are inclined to follow, sometimes to distrust. And moreover, our own thoughts and feelings vary so much ; and our estimate of what is wise and profitable is often altered ; and our changing occupations give such a bent and bias to our wishes ; and the inner voice itself, which spoke loudly yesterday, gives an uncertain sound to-day. Doubtless, to those who would serve God aright, and know His will, and do those things which please Him, and get nearer to Him as day follows day, and have, above all other comforts, the blessing of His peace, it is a very serious trial to be thus perplexed, not to be able to see the way quite clearly, nor quite clearly to discern the place for the next step, or even the nature of the ground whereon we stand. Happy they, whose life has been so pure and whose faith whence that purity sprang, so strong, that the right way has seemed ever the obvious way, and that, as they sought for direction, God has answered them daily in the joy of their heart ! Far apart is their case, from that of those who have had no questionings, because no yearning for Heaven, no hesitation, because no anxiety to find the narrow path, no misgivings, because no rule of walking except the sight of their eyes and the lust of their own will. From such a state may God deliver us ! Far better to endure even the hardness of the inward conflict, the wrestling with self, the sorrow of a darkness which though passing is real, a sense of griev-

ousness for a while in keeping God's commandments, and in taking upon oneself the yoke and burden of JESUS CHRIST.

Yet this condition, of course, is not one that we can rest in. We desire to go on obeying till those "commandments are not grievous,"¹ to learn of CHRIST till His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light,"² to find peace and pleasantness in the ways of a plain religion,³ and brightness and joy out of the sad obscurity, and to serve God without fear. How then may we hope, if not for perfect ease, at least for a conscience free from scruples? how may we best attain, if not the clear shining of the Divine Countenance upon us, at all events the healthful assurance that we are workers together with God, and aided constantly by His counsel? Or how may we draw lasting good out of this apparent hindrance, and how, while we keep our conscience tender, may we make it also sound?

1. Now, first, if we are at times perplexed, it is to teach us that the way of the Christian life is not easy, in the sense in which it is easy to follow our own humours and appetites. Salvation, though wrought for us by the LORD Himself, does after all demand from each of us laborious diligence and earnest care. We must run, not as uncertainly: we must fight, not as if we were beating the air.⁴ Ra-

¹ 1 S. John v. 3.

² S. Matth. xi. 30.

³ Prov. iii. 17.

⁴ 1 Cor. ix. 26.

ther, we have to take heed to all our steps, and to aim real blows against our special faults. And so unexpected are the counter-assaults, and so sudden the perils of the winding road, that it is not to be wondered at, if, again and again, we are hardly put to it to meet them, or if, time after time, we are taken off our guard. But the wounded soldier is not necessarily a beaten man; indeed, his very wounds may show him, how real is the battle, how deadly the foe, how all-important his own steadfast perseverance to the end, how careful he must henceforth be to listen for the captain's voice, and to stand to the post assigned him, and to use, with discretion and watchfulness, "the shield of faith," and "the sword of the Spirit." There is no discharge, he knows, in this war; and he will not be crowned, unless he strive lawfully, in obedience to that voice which has its echo within him, and for the glory of that God, whom he is too apt to forget in the hour of victory. O what a reward—what a life—that must be, which requires all this counsel and might, this care beforehand, and this vigilance throughout, this jealous zeal for the LORD, and this passionate retrieval of defeat, and this anxious exercise of the personal will!

2. But mark next, how this very travail of conscience asserts the liberty of that personal will. Practically, as the difficulty of resisting grace as well as of regarding it reminds us, we are free in our

will to choose; and the perplexities we suffer, even in this liberty, are meant to enhance the joy which shall be ours for every steady step and every conquest won. For, as the occasions arise, the harder we find it to choose rightly, and the greater pains we take so to choose, the stronger is the proof of our desire to please God, and the surer the earnest of our blessing if we do thus decide. It is a precious gift, this free will of ours, but on that very account it makes us tremendously responsible; and our conscience ought to be very quick and faithful in guiding and controlling it; and even in what we might otherwise deem small matters, such as eating and drinking, our conscience should keep up its authority, for it is indeed a minister of God, and must attend continually, as the Holy Scriptures teach us, even on such little things.

3. Yet He Who gave us this did not surely mean to lay a snare upon us, but to impart to us light and grace. And so, when the perplexities of our conscience increase above reason, and make us search into all little corners, and "measure actions by atoms," disorder is at hand. Scruples, as they must feel who have experienced them, and have at last been released from them, are the *plagues* of the spiritual life. Is it not a plague to have a fear of doing everything that is innocent, and to be apt to do everything that can be suggested—to be afraid to believe and ready to doubt anything? Is it not a

plague, when our intentions are really honest and pure, to have one scruple after another rise up and trouble us like the flies of Egypt? Is there not a plague upon us, when our very prayers and readings, aye, and even our partakings of the Holy Communion, become occasions of misery and alarm to us, when, to use the wonderful expression of Jeremy Taylor, the enemy of mankind makes "religion strike itself upon the face by the palsies and weak tremblings of its own fingers?"¹ And, "since scruples do sometimes make men mad, do detriment to our health, make religion a burden, introduce a weariness of spirit and tediousness—it cannot," says the same wise counsellor, "be a sin to stop all this evil, and directly to throw away the scruple, and proceed to contrary actions."²

4. And further, let us recollect, in order to avoid this over-anxiety, that God is not a hard taskmaster, but a FATHER of infinite goodness, who pitieth His own children, and remembereth that we are but dust. If we do our best, or, if at least, after many failures and falls, we try for CHRIST's sake and in the power of His might, to do better, God judges us by our

¹ "Ductor Dubitantium," Bk. i., chap. vi., Rule 1.

² Ibid., Rule 2. The writer thinks that the following short passage from the same great work of the good Bishop may be of real use to some morbid persons: "The scrupulous man fears concerning those things where he ought to be most confident; he fears that God is angry with him for not doing his duty, and yet he does whatsoever he can learn to be his duty." Ibid., Rule 5.

heartly endeavour. If our main purpose is to please Him, He will not be extreme to mark our occasional mistakes as to the path of duty, our occasional mis-readings of the message which is His, but which comes to us through human channels, and is not always so clear and legible as His own shining illuminating Word. And then He will Himself gradually speak more unmistakeably, so that even as we run forward in our worldly business, we may read. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel."¹

5. But once more, though that guidance should be for a while, as our many sins deserve, delayed, let us not be hopeless about ourselves, nor give up the struggle because it is a struggle. "Perplexed," we must "not" be "in despair." There is a way out of every temptation, a clue out of the most tangled maze, a solution for each single difficulty of this short life of ours, a mode of access, near or far, to the rest of God, through labours however hard and paths however dark. Sooner than we think, the trial passes, and there is peace. Only let us grapple manfully while the combat lasts, with those spiritual foes which we can see, and those inward weaknesses of our fallen nature, as to which we can have no doubt whatever. A daily battle with sin, a daily denial of self, daily progress where the light is clear, the daily exercising of ourselves in those gifts of the SPIRIT which we know were given us to profit withal, this

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 24.

² 2 Cor. iv. 8.

should be our work. When, with increasing earnestness, we devote ourselves thereto, and follow faithfully the counsel of our own heart, as conveying to us, however indistinctly at our first awakening, the call and will of Almighty God, the questionings depart, and the doubts vanish, and the fearful anxieties give place to the quietness of a Christian, and the way of the LORD is made plain before our face. Pray that your conscience may be thus a blessing to you—that you may learn to value it as a priceless bestowal from Heaven, and to follow it strictly by finishing evident duties, and by forsaking what it certainly points out to you to be sin. Then its power will be quickened in you, and its biddings will be listened for more heedfully, and its warning voice attended to, and its consolations esteemed above all praise of men. Then, as it tells you of the way, you will walk in it; and as it settles your choice, you will find pleasure therein! and as it draws you on, you will gladly acknowledge its rule, however lonely you may be in that acknowledgment. And gradually your fears and cares will cease, for your heart will not condemn you, and you shall have, in all humility, “confidence toward God.”¹

¹ 1 S. John iii. 21.

XXII.

CHASTISEMENTS COUNTED AS JUDGMENTS.

1 KINGS XVII. 18.

"Art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

THIS agonizing cry of the widow of Sarepta to the man of God very often finds its echo and counterpart in those even of the faithful who, having been chastised of the LORD, think of Him as an Avenger, righteously punishing them for sin. The hopeless sicknesses, or awful deaths, which overwhelm the wicked with the direct and immediate bitterness of the trial, have this further effect upon the servants of CHRIST, that they strike not the mind merely, but the soul—the personal self—so that there is now a secret sorrow and anxiety, over and above that natural grief which is common to us all, and which is known and observed of others.¹ Conscience is hidden, and so its wounds are very deep; and we dare

¹ Many will recollect Dr. Johnson's prayers on the death of his wife.

not tell these to more than one or two—some trusted and beloved physician, or some well-tryed spiritual helper, whose heart is as the grave for our confessions.¹ Many too, who cannot as yet bring themselves to use these Divinely appointed ministrations, which have ere now prevented despair in self-tormenting persons, have at least in their desolation and distress called aloud unto God, as he did whom we think of as among the saints, but who knew himself most unworthy and sinful: "O LORD, Thou breakest Thy judgments in thunder over me, and my bones are shaken with fear and trembling, and my soul is filled with unutterable dread."² If such is the experience even of those nearest to CHRIST, what must not we expect, who are most of us, I will not say imperfect Christians, but like men asleep, needing to be roughly awakened, or very careless disciples, too forgetful of past life and of present dangers, and specially, of that which is coming upon us all, the eternal sentence of our Judge? Heavy storms sweep over the soul at times—so heavy, that they leave their traces on the whole of the after-course; changes such as were

¹ It is not of course meant that the benefit is the same, whether a clergyman or a medical man has our confidence. In the former case there is the power of absolution, which is absent in the latter. But as all physicians know more secrets than most priests, so is there many a Luke in the noblest profession but one, who is as thoroughly true to the sacredness of what is told him by penitents as if he were bound by the obligations of the noblest profession of all.

² "The Imitation of CHRIST," Bk. iii. ch. 12.

scarcely thought of as possible in the fresh brightness of the morning; afflictive losses which can never in this world be made up to us by temporal mercies, however much the spiritual gains may outweigh them; mental difficulties, continually reappearing as the shadows of the offences of our youth; bodily weakness, the actual effect of former self-indulgence; habits clinging to us in the way of temptation, long after we have been enabled to hate the sin and to grapple with it manfully—these things are to us as “the voice of blood,” and we are terrified, and seem to ourselves for a while like those whom the Lord hath forsaken, and who bear about with them their own abiding punishment. And though from time to time there arises in scrupulous minds a morbid fancy that there is some connection between present suffering and past sin, when God did not so intend to sadden us, yet there is often, as we know, a real foundation for the alarm, and it should bring us very close to God. And if some of you, by His mercy, have not these fears of which we speak, be not on that account high-minded, but rather humble yourselves under that mighty Hand of God, and pray Him still to turn from you all those evils which you most righteously have deserved; and learn to sympathize, as Elijah did, with those of the brethren who, for their own great good, are being sorely chastised. And let us, who are thus troubled, look up

and not down under the trial, and consider what it is in us which requires such severe correction, and what is the heavenly purpose which our loving FATHER would have us first discern in our hearts and then work out in our lives. Here surely conscience is on her own proper ground, engaged not in morbid speculations, but in tilling the soil of the soul, deepening its furrows, watching its growth, removing hurtful weeds, and generally preparing for a real fruit unto God.

1. Now the very first duty with regard to this trial is, to submit to it. Even if, as it was with Eli, our tribulation is the real result of our former sin—an act of God's wrath upon us for what we have done or have left undone, the words which he used must be the most suitable for us: "It is the LORD: let Him do what seemeth Him good."¹ This puts us at once into the right posture to receive whatever further lessons He would be pleased to teach us. He will find us kneeling when He comes to reason with us. Godly sorrow never worketh death, but rather, amid the travail pangs of repentance, the willingness to trust God even though He should slay us, as He has already shattered our hopes and that wherein we delighted. And herein lies hid one seed of our future comfort. This Divine instinct of the Christian marks him off, though by no proud conceit of his own, from

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 13—18.

them that know not God. In such a soul there is the habit of referring all things to God, and

"The assured belief
That the procession of our fate, howe'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power :
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good."¹

And with this there is a readiness to acknowledge in itself absolute failure, and a tendency, when the long-feared sorrow or the suddenly inflicted blow does fall, "to lie still and bless the rod."² This surrender of the will, which is the daily sacrifice in lesser matters, becomes as it were a second nature, even when "the reins are consumed within," and the heart has to part from what is really as itself, loving and beloved. You mark this temper in the patience with which the Christian bows himself, amid bitter tears, to the greater griefs, long before he can expect lasting consolation. And so in this secret trial too there is the same spirit of resignation, although accompanied oftentimes with the alarming thought that we are suffering justly a punishment from God.

2. But next we are bound to remember, that, in this world which is one of probation generally to the end, God does not simply punish us. His is a cor-

¹ Wordsworth's "Excursion" (Despondency corrected.)

² "Christian Year."

rective discipline ; and so far from these woes being a sign of His having deserted us, we should rather deprecate being "let alone," like idolatrous Ephraim.¹ "Whom the LORD loveth He chasteneth," even though the chastisement involve the death of wife or child. We cannot think of Eli as a lost soul, though the glory departed from his house on earth, through his weak neglect of his sons ; Samson surely will not be deprived of his strength eternally, or of the blessed vision of God, because he forfeited both sight and power to a passing infirmity ; David is not among the apostates, though he was bereaved of his little child, and though the sword never left his family by reason of his grievous crime. It was not with these as with Saul ; there is no desperation in their sorrow, no utter alienation from God, no thorough withdrawal of His SPIRIT. And yet in their case too, the sentence, as far as this world was concerned, was fixed, and God would not reverse it. It should be a source, then, of inexpressible comfort to us, when we are chastened of the LORD, to be able to feel that this is so, not by way of judgment, but so "that we should *not* be condemned with the world."²

3. Nay more ! this scourging is an earnest of future acceptance. The privileges of a son are opened to us more fully through this bitter experience, which tells of a FATHER's wise severity, winning us to Himself by the whirlwind and the fire since we would

¹ Hosea iv. 17.

² 1 Cor. xi. 32.

not listen to the "still small Voice." God knows how hardly some of us shall be saved, and so lest we should lose ourselves and be cast away, He adds apparently trial to trial, really blessing to blessing, so that at each warning we may strike more closely into the narrow way. And at last we are almost confounded by the alarming revelation of ourselves and of our peril, disclosed to us in some great visitation, wherein God strips us bare. Only, He makes our faces ashamed, on purpose that we may seek His Name, and thus may be delivered from "everlasting contempt." He enables us to feel the wholesomeness even of punishment, preparing us thereby for the joy of the beautiful crown—the exceeding great reward which is Himself, and which can never fail us, though all things else should be taken away.

4. But above all, let us recollect, what seriousness should be wrought in us, what indignation against ourselves, what deep sincere repentance, by a correction so loving yet so awful. It has been said that you may tell a penitent from one who never fell, by the stern look upon his very face: the stern look which speaks of inward wrestling, and the secret sorrow of having been defeated, and the strict watchfulness required for keeping off old enemies, and the sense of contrast between himself so polluted and God so Holy, and the grave sobriety of one who remembers how near he was at one time to the pit of corruption. And when to all this is added the keen

regret for a loss which God knew to be necessary to salvation, we may well suppose that even the outward appearance will often be an index of the heart ; and as we consider, the shadows will begin to overcloud our own countenance, and memory will bring before us the long-forgotten acts and words of wilful sin, and will disclose to us the meaning and the object of afflictions which we have had to bear for years without understanding them ; and the work of true repentance, thus begun in us, will enlarge itself more and more, and bring us, thoroughly aroused and thoroughly sorry, to the Cross of the Son of God.

5. For it is the "Precious Blood" to which God would take us out of ourselves, after He has shown us what we are apart from It. That Precious Blood is not really valued by us, till we have discovered the frightful stains upon our souls, the iron bondage under which we have been held, the penetrating pervading power of one deadly sin. It is when we feel the shame, and the intolerable burden, and the loss of God, and the loathing for ourselves, and the unutterable remorse of having injured others, that we begin to "comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height, and to know the love of CHRIST" Who hath redeemed us to God by His Blood, and Who is, this day as in the generations of old, "our Peace."¹ "Thanks be to

¹ Eph. iii. 18 ; Rev. v. 9 ; Eph. ii. 14.

God for His unspeakable gift.”¹ This is the ceaseless praise which rings through the Christian’s heart. With this, he says to himself, I will go forward, forgetting, except to repent more thoroughly of, those things which are behind. With this I will go forward through the darkness, assured that the light will dawn at last. With this I will go forward, guided and blest, until

“The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.”

Only, my friends, while the trial is yet upon you, use it well. You feel like one condemned ; condemn yourself, and God will spare you ; “for if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.”² The very severity of God’s punishments may give you hope : for it shows you how great was His loving-kindness, not to pass you by unchastened, when chastisement was so sorely needed by you.³ The very awfulness of His rebuke may prove a blessing ; for it may quicken your ear to hear, your heart to act upon, His present calls. Listen to them, for they are calls to instant obedience, to thorough self-sacrifice. Obey them, with a godly fear, as one smitten and yet spared, chastened yet not killed. Devote yourself, as one alive from the dead, saved from the burning which was death to others—devote

¹ 2 Cor. ix. 15.

² 1 Cor. xi. 31.

³ See Dr. Pusey’s Sermons, vol. i. p. 184.

yourself to the loving service, which makes men free, and gives them the power to rejoice in hope. And then the blessing shall be yours ; for if (to take up the prophet's word of humble trustfulness) we now tremble in ourselves, we too shall "rest in the day of trouble,"¹ and, as an Apostle reminds us, when all these tribulations are past, our love will have been so perfected as to cast out fear, so that "we may have boldness" even "in the day of judgment."²

¹ Habakkuk iii. 16.

² 1 S. John iv. 17.

XXIII.

ALARM ABOUT THE HOLY COMMUNION.

1 COR. XI. 29.

"Not discerning the Lord's Body."

JUDGED, as we think, for the past, may we not well be afraid for ourselves now? If former chastisements have made us tremble, might not our minds misgive us as to our use of present blessings? Even those frequent invitations to the Altar which we hear, seem blended, to our inmost heart, with anxious voices and stern warnings—echoes, as it were, of the Sacred Scripture itself, declaring that "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself."

Now the words that follow imply that the great peril at Holy Communion consists in "*not discerning the LORD's Body.*" Therefore it must be right for us to try and understand what is meant by discerning It. May the LORD, Whose It is, keep far from us both the spirit of controversy and the spirit of unbelief! may He, Who gave It "for the life of the

world,"¹ prevent us alike from thinking that It is nothing to *us*, and from approaching It, in our Christian religion, carelessly ! may He, who meant It for a pledge of union among all who sincerely love Him, enable His minister not only to avoid all words that may do hurt, but also to draw together, in bonds of faith and charity, many souls around that Holy Table ! And hearing that prayer, you, my friends, will remember that it is for *practical* purposes that we speak of so solemn a matter : not in order that we may question, or cavil, or dispute, but that we may examine ourselves, prove our own selves, prepare our souls to receive CHRIST, set aside all scruple and doubtfulness : not in order that we may presumptuously define the Presence, but that we may duly reverence It and duly use It : not that we may stand afar off, wondering, but that we may make it—one and all of us—our deliberate purpose sooner or later to go to such a Heavenly Feast.

We know, then, that "JESUS CHRIST is come in *the flesh*." If we did not believe that, we should not be Christians, for "every spirit that confesseth not that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh is not of God, and this," (says the HOLY GHOST by S. John,) "this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come ; and even now already is it in the world."² We know that "as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He likewise Him-

¹ S. John vi. 51.

² 1 S. John iv. 3.

self also took part of the same, that by means of death," (which needed a Body,) "He might destroy him that had the power of death."¹ We know that He rose from the dead, not merely as a Spirit, but as a Man, "for a Spirit hath not flesh and bones," as the disciples saw He *had*.² We know that with that selfsame Body He ascended up on high, and therein sitteth at the Right Hand of God, till He returns, not only as our LORD, but as that *Man* Whom God hath ordained to judge us.³ All this we know; but we know also that at His Incarnation the Flesh which He took became bread which He could give,⁴ not merely a Body whose steps we were to follow: that our FATHER sent Him, not only to die for us, but also to be our spiritual Food and sustenance in a holy Sacrament: that, before He died, He instituted that holy Sacrament, which two of the sacred writers tell us He appointed to be done "in remembrance" of Him⁵—and in which four of the sacred writers tell us He said of the bread which He had broken, "This is My Body."⁶ We know, from yet another of the sacred writers,⁷ that our LORD, in that discourse which was founded on His Divine Nature, His human Birth, His atoning Death, His coming Ascension, declared that His Flesh was Meat

¹ Heb. ii. 14.² S. Luke xxiv. 39.³ Acts xvii. 31.⁴ S. John vi. 51.⁵ S. Luke (xxii. 19) and S. Paul (1 Cor. xi. 24.)⁶ S. Matth. (xxvi. 26,) S. Mark (xiv. 22,) S. Luke and S. Paul (l. c.)⁷ S. John vi.

indeed, and His Blood drink indeed, and that whoso should eat That Flesh and drink That Blood should have, even on earth, eternal Life. And lastly, we know that that Body which is in Heaven, though glorified, is yet real—that It has spiritual as well as natural properties—that It is holy whether far off or near—and that It has a quickening power, because It is the Body of that “Quickening Spirit” Who said, “He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.”

Here then, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, the doctrine of the Church with the truth of the Word, the needs of man with the promises of CHRIST, we seem to gather what it is to discern the LORD’s Body. Lay undue stress upon any *one* of these points which follow, and you may fall into the very mistakes, and sometimes deadly errors, from which we would turn you away. Think of them together, weighing each with the others, and though I cannot pretend that you will thoroughly comprehend this part of “the mystery of godliness,” you will at least have something to help you with regard to This, which most people think of as awful, but which comparatively few consider a blessing and comfort. “I speak as unto wise men,” (you recollect what chapter this sentence is taken from, and will not be surprised to hear it now,) “I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say.”¹

1. First, then, if we would be seen of God, “dis-

¹ 1 Cor. x. 15, cf. 16, 17.

cerning the LORD's Body," we must appreciate It as *really present*. We have more than a bare sign of an absent LORD. He is *there* to be discerned.¹ Through these means, since CHRIST Himself has ordained them, and through no other means, since no others have been for this ordained by Him, we can receive His Body and Blood. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion—the mode through which we partake—of the Blood of CHRIST? The Bread which we break, is it not the Communion—the mode through which we partake—of the Body of CHRIST?" The Apostle does not tell us *how* these precious gifts are there, any more than our

¹ It might be objected that this would involve the reception by the wicked, and, in consequence, a contradiction of the formularies of the Church of England. But the writer ventures to think that the analogy given in note 3 on page 257, suggests an explanation, not indeed of the mystery itself, (which is to us, like other truths of GOD, inexplicable in this world,) but of this particular difficulty connected with it. Man is a living soul. Cain comes and kills the body, but is not able to kill the soul; yet he is verily guilty concerning the soul of his murdered brother; indeed, the heinousness of his crime consists in this, (as we learn in the next Divine command about the shedder of blood,) that he has slain one made in the Image of GOD—which of course refers to the spirit and not to the outward shape. So with regard to this Sacrament. JESUS saith, "This is My Body." The wicked approaches, and eateth and drinketh the consecrated elements unworthily, and is "guilty of the Body and Blood of the LORD," though he cannot touch or be partaker of These, in such a way as to receive CHRIST, present ineffably under the form of bread and wine.

SAVIOUR tells us *how* these things can be. He does tell us *what* they are; •He does show us by His Apostle that the precious gifts are very real. Just as we do not doubt that when but two or three of us are met together in His Name, He, according to His promise, is in the midst of us, so ought we to feel quite sure that, in the *One* service which He specially commanded us to continue, He, whom we remember there, does visit us. It is indeed a Memorial, and there is exceeding great comfort in the Church's belief—put forth daily at her altars—that there is no *repetition* of that tremendous Death, but that He made *once* upon the Cross, “a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.”¹ But of that one act of Love—the most wonderful that was ever shown—we have pledges in the Holy Eucharist; and as in faith we eat and drink, we really dwell in Him and He in us. Is He not there, though the Bread is there also?² Think of the “live coal” with which the seraph

¹ The Canon of Consecration.

² There is a remarkable illustration of this, as a belief of the Early Church, in one of the inscriptions of the Catacombs. In the centre is an altar, on which is placed the bread; to this a priest, (vested in what we should call a surplice and stole,) is bringing the sacred fish or *IXΘΥΣ* (i.e. the Presence of our LORD—this well-known Greek anagram giving us, in its five letters, the initials of five Greek words which mean respectively, JESUS, CHRIST, GOD'S, SON, the SAVIOUR,) while a bystander, the only other person represented, is holding up his hands in adoration.

touched Isaiah's shrinking lips—of the living man who stood before the angel, a lump of clay yet a messenger for the LORD—of the Quickening Spirit Whose glory the prophet saw, Whose glory the Evangelist declared, hidden as it was under "the form of a servant."¹ What the nature of fire is to the substance of the fuel—what the reasonable soul is to the human flesh—what the Divine Spirit of JESUS is to His Virgin-born Manhood—that the Body of our LORD is to the consecrated Bread, and His Blood to the Cup when we have blest it.

2. But next, these very illustrations may remind us that the LORD's Body must be "*spiritually* discerned,"² for It is itself spiritual, though real.

¹ Isa. vi. 1 ; S. John xii. 40, 41.

² The Greek word, it is true, here rendered by the English "discerned," is *ἀνακρίναι*; whereas in the passage about the Holy Communion, (1 Cor. xi. 29,) that which our translators call "discerning," is, in the original, *διακρίναι*. Yet the one may be used to illustrate the other, and to show how necessary is a spiritual mind, not only for the comprehension of the deep things of God, but also for the reception of His wonderful gifts in CHRIST. Of the two verbs, *ἀνακρίναι* means to examine into, with a view to judgment, as did Pilate, (S. Luke xxiii. 14)—*διακρίναι*, to distinguish, to tell one from another, to discern as communicants do when, in the language of our Prayer Book, they consider the LORD's Body, and see how different from common bread and wine are these elements when consecrated to a sacramental use. What a help it would be to us, if the simpler and more ancient form for delivering these could be restored! "The Body of the LORD." "The Blood of the LORD." How solemn this would be; how

Just as the world could not receive the HOLY GHOST because it did not *see* Him,¹ so the tendency of the sceptic is to refuse to accept either the fact of man's having a soul, or the doctrine of CHRIST's Divinity, because these are not within the sphere of the senses. And as we not only detect the existence of the fire burning in the coal, by its light and warmth, but also have a witness within ourselves² of the Presence of the Invisible SPIRIT through His pleading with us, comforting us, stirring us up to pray, leading us to holiness,—so is our unseen soul as real to us as our ever-changing body, and the hidden God in CHRIST as thoroughly matter of faith to us as the history of "the Man CHRIST JESUS." So too this holy Presence whereof we speak is an object of *faith*. If, after Consecration, there were no longer any bread or wine there, there would be no difficulty whatever about discerning the Body and Blood of the LORD ;³

suggestive of penitence and faith ; how comforting to the humble believer's heart !

¹ S. John xiv. 17. ² A witness independent of the senses.

³ To the believer, of course, it is, to all intents and purposes of this Blessed Sacrament, as if the bread and wine were no longer there. Of these we can say, remembering our LORD's words of institution, "He takes them up into a higher nature ; and when so consecrated, although their original nature is not annihilated, it passes out of spiritual cognizance, and the eye of faith sees, or desires to see it no more."—*Annotated Book of Common Prayer*, p. 152. The writer ventures to think that either of the three analogies suggested above will help to solve the difficulty felt as to

and there would be no need for S. John to declare unto us Him Whom, in the days of His Flesh, the disciples had heard, and seen, and handled, for we should have been able to handle and see Him for ourselves.¹ But in truth we have in this Sacrament an outward visible sign *and* an inward and spiritual grace; and we must not confound the one with the other. Our weakness craves for something that it can touch—something that will prove itself. You ask for more than a sign: we tell you that this is much more than a sign, for it is a means of grace—a channel of actual Communion between CHRIST and Christians; but you want a visible Helper. Do not you perceive that this is exactly what we cannot have in this world, where “we walk by faith and not by sight?” Take the secrets of your own heart and life, your own untold anguish, your own yearning desires, your own settled purposes and plans. “What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man that is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the SPIRIT of God.”² But then, in order that we *may* discern these mysteries,

the words of institution, (“This is My Body.”) If, for instance, we take the subject and predicate of one of the three, and join them together by the copula, we have an expression corresponding exactly to that of Holy Scripture itself, with regard to that being, whose outward part was formed like bread, out of the dust, (“Man became a living soul,”) “This is a living soul.”

¹ 1 S. John i. 1.

² 1 Cor. ii. 11.

there is something in us which lifts us above the infidel and the earthly : for "we have received not the spirit of the world, but the SPIRIT which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."¹

3. What is it which gives us, as it were, an echo of this spiritual teaching? The conviction which is so strong in almost all, so very strong in those who forsake the ways of the LORD, that His Presence in this sacrament is a *Holy* Presence. It is this which has providentially thrown "a wall of fire" round about it, lest men should break through and perish : and it is this unhappily which, "like *daily-handled* fire,"² sometimes so hardens men that they forget their first fear, their first wholesome humility, their first careful approaches, and they come at last to count the Blood of the Covenant wherewith they were sanctified, an *unholy* thing.³ I know not whether there be any of you who have thought thus lightly of an ordinance so sacred : but I know that we do, many of us, need to have it deeply impressed upon our souls, that there is a "dignity" about this "Holy Mystery," and that we ought to treat it with

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 12.

² The phrase was used by Bishop Wilberforce in his warning to us whom he had ordained to the ministry, as to the unhallowed familiarity with Holy Writ. May we profit by his many fatherly counsels !

³ Heb. x. 29.

the greatest reverence. How ashamed some amongst us would feel if the cry should *now* sound through the sanctuary, as it went forth in the assemblies of the early Church, "Holy things for holy persons!" Our sinful bodies so near to His Body! our earth-bound souls so near to His most precious Blood! our passions, our pride, our selfishness, our intemperance, our filthiness, so near to His perfections! "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."¹

4. *Yet*, my friends, it is just in that lowly voice and thought of self-reproach that our safety lies. For "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged,"² and if, in true repentance, we would count ourselves unworthy, God would not weigh our merits, but would pardon our offences through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. So real, and therefore so majestic—so spiritual, and therefore so much above our poor measure of faith—so holy, and therefore so unlike our erring hearts—the Presence has yet one other aspect in which we may discern it, and in which as we do discern it, we shall find the greatest possible consolation and encouragement. The LORD's Body is life-sustaining, life-restoring: "As the FATHER raiseth up the dead and quickeneth

¹ Isa. vi. 5.

² 1 Cor. xi. 31. This is said, it will be remembered, with special reference to the Holy Communion.

them, even so the SON quickeneth whom He will."¹ It is the Body of my SAVIOUR, and His Body was given for *me*.² To Him, therefore, not because I am sound, but because I am sick, not because there is health in me, but because there is healing in Him, not as trusting in my own righteousness, but in God's manifold and great mercies shown through Him and through Him alone, to Him I must even go. The Apostle does not say, when a man has found out his faults, let him stay away from that Holy Table, but, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him *eat* of that Bread and *drink* of that Cup."³ And why? because the faults which we discover to our shame cannot be purged except by Him, and because His Blood "*cleanseth us from all sin.*"⁴ Surely it is a Presence to be sought, a Presence to be received. Surely, *whenever* that Death is shown forth, *whenever* that Life is manifested for us, there ought not to be wanting in the House of Prayer a sufficient number of persons, ready to partake in thankfulness and faith. Did we but think of JESUS as our Life, did we but trust His Word, did we but remember, that, "*till He come,*" this Holy Communion is our nearest access to Him, we should no longer stand aloof as many of us do—we should

¹ S. John v. 21.

² What an all-sufficient reason for addressing the words of administration to each communicant separately!

³ 1 Cor. xi. 28.

⁴ 1 S. John i. 7.

wait no more, but should seek the LORD and His strength.

Even if, as many rightly fear, the past is full of witnesses against us in the matter of "not discerning the LORD's Body," we need not be afraid, in our repentance, that we did actually eat and drink damnation to ourselves. Not damnation as yet, but judgment, is the sentence against the unworthy partaker. Had the Apostle meant what our English Bible gives he would not have gone on in the following verses as he does. For he tells the Corinthians there, you see, that because of this lack of discernment, because of this impenitent nearness, "many are weak and sickly among them, and many sleep;" and he implies that if this sentence works repentance, this sickness shall not be unto death; and that even though their bodies die in much pain and wrath, their souls may be saved in the day of the LORD—for he says, "When we are judged, we are chastened of the LORD, that we should *not* be *condemned* with the world." And though we touch here on those secret things which belong unto God, we can at least understand that chastisements, short of death, such as we ourselves have suffered, may have been sent to us for this very reason, that we might be sorry for that carelessness of ours about that for which we should have prepared ourselves with *much* care—with some deep furrows, if we had not time to plough up the whole field of our heart. Those imperfect Commu-

nions must form part of our confession now; and then, even for these, we need not distrust the power of the Sacrifice which we plead yet again before God this day. This as to the past—but what do we purpose as to the time to come? Of the future, indeed, we dare not speak; but there is at least the living present in which we can act for God—the accepted time, in which the blessings of the Covenant of Grace are still freely offered to us. Here once more you can discern the LORD's Body. Believe in It as real, own It to be spiritual, prepare for It as holy, welcome It as life-sustaining: and then, without any outward show, but with involuntary humility—the quiet reverence of faith and love—the deep self-abasement of a heart truly penitent and thoroughly pardoned, draw nigh and take the Body of your LORD.

We truly *need* It, do we not? There is such a hunger which we cannot satisfy—our souls are so very thirsty for the Living God, amid these pleasures which perish as we use them—we are so full of labour till we learn to work in CHRIST. We know no help but Him, no gifts are lasting like His, no Presence is cleansing, refreshing, strengthening, like that which is here bestowed—our Redeemer is mighty, He loves us, we cannot go from Him:

“My spirit longeth for Thee
 Within my troubled breast,
 Although I be unworthy
 Of so Divine a Guest.

“ Of so Divine a Guest
 Unworthy though I be,
 Yet has my heart no rest
 Unless it come from Thee.
 “ Unless it come from Thee,
 In vain I look around ;
 In all that I can see
 No rest is to be found.”¹

Then the soul hears, what comfortable words our SAVIOUR CHRIST saith unto all that truly turn to Him: “ Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”² And we go, and He letteth us depart in peace, according to His word.

Yet as you depart from the inner courts where His Presence blest you, *remember* It: discern It in yourself, and be careful to avoid all filthiness of the flesh and spirit: discern It in others, partakers with you of the same grace, and honour, love, help, compassionate them for the LORD’s sake. Discern It in *them*, and you will do your very best not to make even one brother or sister to offend: discern It in your own secret self, and It shall give you ever-fresh motives to humility of mind, ever-restored power for holiness, ever-new aids to faith and to the blessed hope of being like Him, when, “ *within* the veil,” “ you see Him as He is.”

¹ John Byrom, 1773.

² S. Matth. xi. 28.

XXIV.

COLDNESS AFTER THE EUCHARIST.

PS. XLIII. 2.

*"Thou art the God of my strength; why hast Thou put me from
Thee: and why go I so heavily?"*

IF sometimes we are afraid to go to the highest service of the Christian Church, because of the sense of our general unworthiness and of our special sins, it often happens also that even after we have taken the Holy Sacrament of CHRIST'S Body and Blood, we seem not to have taken It to our comfort, so dull is our heart, so feeble the assurance of our union with the LORD of life and grace. And, since we are touching here not so much upon that large field of spiritual dryness which we have already traversed under the guidance of some of God's saints, as upon that peculiar part of it which concerns communicants as communicants, we may perhaps, without needless repetition, regard this as a separate trial, and try to set before ourselves some thoughts of practical encouragement. Simply stated then, the difficulty is this,—You know that it is a duty to par-

take of the Holy Communion, and you do partake thereof, being persuaded that JESUS is the God of your strength; but you tell me, that, after you have been to Him; and almost as soon as the jubilant words of the "*Gloria in Excelsis*" have died away, the peace of God does not seem to keep your heart and mind through CHRIST JESUS. You go from the service back to your home and your usual occupations, and it is as if the Great King had not visited you in the beauty of holiness, and as if the glimpse of the land that is very far off had been unreal, for your soul is earth-bound, and your devotion has lost its fervour. Can it be that you are cast off? Can it be that you received no lasting benefit? Can it be that you have come away with a curse instead of a blessing? Can it be that you are a standing warning to Christians not to go? How sad it is that we should even put such questions to ourselves! Surely, it is no slight trial to be in such a state as to require such anxious doubtings. It is not enough to say that we must set aside these scruples. Rather, let us, if we can, meet them, and sift them, and weigh them against other considerations, and gain from them that true help which any trial may work for us, through the mercy of God.

1. Let us ask then, first, why we do approach that Holy Table? We do so as an act of obedience, and in order to "show the LORD's Death."¹ All Chris-

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 26.

tians, whatever be their differences, virtually agree in this. The man who can persuade himself that there is nothing but a piece of bread for him to take therein, and the man, who believes, distrusting his senses, that there is after consecration no bread left at all, are both of them, if sincere, as thoroughly convinced that they are doing what they do in remembrance of CHRIST crucified, as he is who without expecting a change of substance, discerns as actually there, the Flesh that was given for the life of the world.¹ Viewed as tokens of an absent SAVIOUR, or as forms of His Real Presence, the elements do, in any case, suggest to the devout communicant, (and we are thinking of none other whatsoever now,) the one awful "Dying of the LORD JESUS."² And though a partial and one-sided conception of those Holy Mysteries cannot be a safe or right doctrine to rest upon, so that we should pray, every one of us, that we may believe all that CHRIST meant and made them to be, yet it is surely some satisfaction to mark how, amid all our unhappy divisions, each serious face, each living heart, does turn, even at the time of apparently widest separation,³ to the great Central Truth, which consoles and sustains us all. And on this we ground this further thought, applicable to all

¹ S. John vi. 51.

² 2 Cor. iv. 10.

³ It is not meant, of course, that this was intended to be so; we have a notable proof to the contrary in the earliest teaching of John Wesley, who urged his people to receive the Holy Communion at

who name the name of CHRIST in sincerity, that whether our hearts burn within us afterwards, or are in a manner cold and sad, this need have absolutely nothing to do with the way in which we have fulfilled our SAVIOUR'S command; and celebrated His meritorious Cross and Passion. Nay! I know, that if I went with penitence and faith, I have been honouring that Holy LORD, uplifted high.

2. But this humble confidence and quietness of mind will be deepened in us, if we recollect the further purpose of the Blessed Eucharist, the spiritual grace of this joyful, solemn, continuous Memorial. Take the very words of Him Who appointed it the same night in which He was betrayed to death—those words which could never have been completely understood, all through those two years, *until* that night. “He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him.” “Whoso eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath eternal life.”¹ So, His indwelling, strengthening, quickening *Life* is that which makes the Death so full of comfort to us, the Memorial of the Death so suggestive of power, and of renewal, and of a hope that reaches to the everlasting glory. Each time we draw

Church, wherever the preaching might be. But the practical effect is in the other direction. It is the *members* who form the nucleus and stay of each religious body, and who really constitute each to be a *separate* religious body at all.

¹ S. John vi. 56, 54.

near with faith, it is as if we heard Him saying unto us, "Fear not; I am He that liveth, and was dead, and behold! I am alive for evermore."¹ Yes, and He tells us more than this, for He shows us that this Resurrection-life of His, sacramentally imparted, is ours in Him: "He that eateth Me, even He shall live by Me."² And though, like the Israelites of old, when we go to the Altar of God, it is to His Altar who is the God of our joy and gladness, yet it is nowhere promised us, that each participation shall make us, while we are in the body, glad and joyful; but rather that it shall bring something far better, according to the comfortable words just repeated, a Divine indwelling, a Divine life. To have this, is to have Him with us, who is grave though beautiful, still though perfectly happy. To live in Him is to be active without restlessness, fervent without excitement, to maintain carefulness without anxiety, zeal without impatience; it is to be sure of the final issue, and so not to attempt to hasten His work; to seek progress rather than speed, the pain rather than the savour of the sacrifice, devotion to duty rather than the sensible delight of obedience; to wait for the crown, instead of craving to wear it now when we have so much work to do, so many sins to conquer, so many graces to gain, so much advance to make in holiness ere we are indeed like Him, the glorious Head of His imperfect members.

¹ Rev. i. 18.² S. John vi. 57.

3. Are you thus learning to live His Life? are you, after each Communion, more in conformity with the Mind of CHRIST—His Purity, His Humility, His Gentleness, His self-renouncing Love, His thoughtful care and diligence for others? If not, how can you wonder that the consolations seem so small to you? Surely there is something more than consolation lacking. Rather, there is that which would render even apparent peace mere self-deceit, or a mere bodily phenomenon—want of working faith, want of fruitful earnestness, want of the personal exercise of those gifts of God, which, because they are so real, make us so tremendously responsible. We cannot look for peace, if we do not walk in that way of peace whereon He has begun to guide us; nor can we rejoice in His Strength, unless we are trying to continue strong; nor can we even be satisfied in our LORD, when, after He has granted us Himself, we crave for other satisfactions in the things around us apart from Him. Watchfulness, self-recollection, prayer which can be called ceaseless because ever ready to flow forth, conscious union with the Holy God, instant obedience in little points of duty—this is the path to peace, when we leave the sanctuary of our strengthening LORD. Can we wonder, if we do not walk therein, that the effect of His heavenly might seems so soon to vanish away? But if, when we do honestly set ourselves thus to move onward, when we not only examine our-

selves beforehand, but are also strict and vigilant afterwards, we still are troubled with coldness of heart, we need not be utterly cast down. See, you are willing to seek God's help in prayer, even because of this very coldness; you are more vigorous against sin, in spite of the coldness; more anxious for the Presence of God, although you fancy He has put you from Him; more resolute to be on His side, though for a while you go heavily and the enemy oppresseth you. Surely, these are signs of good and not of evil; only sometimes our own fervour "is most real when we are least conscious of it." "If," as has been truly said, "the strength" infused by that Precious Food "increases with each Communion, if we acquire self-control, if we are less self-indulgent, more devoted, more patient, more steadfast in our resolutions, more indifferent to the world's praise or blame, more docile to the leanings of grace, we may rest satisfied that our Communions are good."¹

4. And if, as is likely, we still feel perplexed at the absence of that warm delight which has now and then been bestowed upon us, let us take up the thought on which we dwelt before, only in a different manner. It is the Death of the LORD which we commemorate, the slaying of the Lamb which gives us this spiritual Food and sustenance. But does not this remind us that on the heart of each communicant the Cross of CHRIST must indeed be graven?

¹ "The Hidden Life," p. 108.

Love for *His* Cross Who died for us, resignation to the cross He lays upon us, quiet perseverance in bearing the cross after Him ; this must often be the test of the excellence, the blessing, the lasting value of our Communion. He chooses for us the solid reality of His Presence, rather than the brightness thereof, which is more proper to Heaven, where we shall see Him, than to earth, where we walk by faith. Let us be thoroughly content with whatsoever He shall order for us. As when we go forward cheerily, it must be with the Apostle's confession, "not I, but CHRIST liveth in me,"¹ so, should our portion be, for a little while, this heaviness, let us recollect that not even death itself can separate us from the Love of God, which is in CHRIST JESUS our LORD.² Let us serve God, and obey the last commandment of His SON, not so much through a desire for present rapture as from a wish to prove in this, as in common labours, the sincerity of our love ; and though we should ever pray for "joy in the HOLY GHOST,"³ it must be in submission to the wise laws of the Kingdom of God, and in the spirit of those who are not merely longing to be happy, but striving to be holy, craving, if He will give it, some lowly place in the Home beyond, but, above all, hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

¹ Gal. ii. 20.

² Rom. viii. 38, 39.

³ Rom. xiv. 17.

XXV.

OUR DISTANCE FROM GOD.

EPH. V. 1.

"Be ye therefore followers of God."

THE very sound of these words suggests to us, not only our unworthiness to be ever near God, but also our actual remoteness from Him now. As in knowledge of mysteries, so in personal holiness, we know ourselves, whatever be our attainments, to be very far off from Him. Christians in heart are those who most keenly feel that sense of separation and of unlikeness—Christians in heart, who do try to set God always before them, and to live, for Him alone, a life of purity and obedience, and to seek, by faith and patience, the eternal glory of His presence. Such persons, keenly realizing as they do their duties and their privileges, their high calling and their priceless hope, are yet the very ones to mourn in secret, as in the body of their fellow Churchmen,¹ the lack of that spiritual health which springs only from close communion with God, and strict imitation of

¹ "There is no health in us."—*General Confession.*

His perfections. And so, both in the great congregation of humble worshippers, and in the private self-searching of their own chamber, it is borne in upon them how far short they come of the glory of God. Is it not your confession, too, ye who are allowed the very closest access to Him, that the distance from Him is still so great? Made as we were in God's image, created anew in God's SON, suffered to be—even in our body, which is the instrument in so many of our sins—The Temple of God's Holy SPIRIT, we yet own ourselves, and with awful truth, so unlike all that He has revealed Himself to be. Or to take that one point which the Apostle is here urging upon the Ephesians, and which is urged again and again upon us,—the point of *love*: how faintly, at our very best, we resemble Him, Whose mercies are infinite, and Whose love was manifested in that which Scripture calls “His unspeakable gift”—the sacrifice, the stupendous sacrifice, of His Blessed SON! Think of our love for man: how many by-ends are in it, how much selfishness, what weak, changeable, inconsistent ways, how little of that high desire which seeks the best, truest, everlasting interests of its object, and which would be content with no return, so that it could but serve and help and raise and comfort another! Think of our love for God—if indeed we can dare to think of that—with its coldness, its self-seeking, its delays, its postponement to a thousand other cares and pleasures, its earthly tone

and spirit, its daily unfruitfulness in action, its lack of that which alone makes it really fervent, really watchful, really able to endure—the habit of walking with God. It is good for us for awhile to recognize all this. One knows well, even as one speaks of it, how very many there are who never mark this tremendous contrast between themselves and God most Holy, how very few can enter into and make their own the humility of the saint, finding himself in soul far off from JESUS, and therefore in body much too near Him, and so constrained to say, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O LORD.” But the world learns some of its chief lessons from Christians on their knees, and those of us too who are least in earnest may be brought at last to the foot of the Cross, and have the heavy burden lifted from our hearts, by seeing first the deep self-abasement of persons holier than ourselves, and then tracing this up to its source—the conviction of the awful Purity which is our Pattern, in the nature of Him Who made us, and in the Life of Him Who died for us. These, often, are the earlier steps of that upward course, which leads us, as it were, through a lonely desert, and past the burning bush, and into the Garden of Gethsemane, and up to the darkness of the Mount of Crucifixion, till at length we gain a personal “fellowship with the FATHER and with His SON JESUS CHRIST.”¹ And therefore it is that it is

¹ 1 S. John i. 3.

in truth a better sign to have, as most ungodly men and women do have, a dread of what is given, taken, and eaten, in the Communion of the LORD, than to go to it as if there were nothing in it. For that which is so awful is only awful because it is Divine, and, as it must be right to reverence that, so such souls may go on to see their utter need of it, since everything apart from God must vanish away.

But of course it is specially of those who come to God that we are speaking—of those who would follow Him and keep with Him and partake of Him and love Him heartily, and who yet are painfully conscious of being so little like their FATHER, so unfit to have the Name of CHRIST named over them, so utterly unworthy of the indwelling of the HOLY GHOST. How can this knowledge of our distance from God prove a blessing for us? to what does it call us? what is the real hope and promise wrapped up in that solemn exhortation?

1. First, there is encouragement even in the words which seem, at the outset, suggestive of impossibilities. We are to be not merely watchers and worshippers of this glorious God, but actually followers and imitators of Him. What a marvellous honour for us men! As, on the one hand, God does not suffer us to be satisfied with any lower standard, in our endeavours after the righteousness of His Kingdom, so we may be sure that when He says to us,

"Be ye holy, for I am holy,"¹ or "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your FATHER which is in Heaven is perfect,"² He lays upon us no greater responsibility than we can really bear, no stricter charge than we can indeed obey. The measure of the capacities of man is the only limit to his thorough imitation of God; and He, who created man for Himself and made him to be an image of His own eternity, can train him up, through all degrees of grace, to be, so far as a finite creature can reflect the Creator who is Infinite, like unto Himself.

2. And then—thanks be unto God—we have in that LORD who is "the express Image of His Person,"³ the example which, however perfect, does still show us a perfection which may be our own, since He who left us those steps to walk in, was not only God, but had also the weakness, the wrestlings, the bitter teachings, the hardly-bent will, the imparted strength, the final victory of a Very Man:

"The SON of GOD with radiance beamed
Too bright for us to scan:
But we may catch the light which streamed
From the mild Son of man."⁴

His Patience, His Humility, His self-forgetful Love, His entire self-sacrifice, are within our reach, in such a way that we may study them closely, and shape

¹ 1 S. Pet. i. 15, 16.

² S. Matth. v. 48.

³ Heb. i. 3.

⁴ "The Christian Year."

our life and character in accordance with them. The blessed steps of that most holy life we may follow—ay, and we must follow them, if we would show the intense value which we set upon His death, and would prove, in God's sight, the reality of our love to Him. And this, assuredly, should be a great and stirring help to Christians, since we have generally so many obstacles in our way, but here a guiding light close to our feet, and a Brother of our own, whom we need never lose sight of, tempted as we are, yet without sin, sharing all our infirmities, but mastering them all in the power of God, a thorough servant like ourselves, only ever faithful to Him who had appointed Him. Following Him, we should become, in spite of our unbelief, followers of God.

8. And then, in Him, God is not far off from any one of us. As He died to join us again to God, so, when we were baptized into His Name, we were absolutely made, through Him, "partakers of the Divine Nature;"¹ and as His HOLY SPIRIT baptizes us into that one Body, so does He fulfil the promise which was to them that were "afar off," and enable us to realise the blessed truth that we are at all events "made nigh by the Blood of CHRIST."² We may indeed, if we take no care about our souls, be made thus near only for our condemnation: but near we are, and this may be a daily stay to us, as indeed it is a daily call. And let us connect with this—for

¹ 2 S. Pet. i. 4.

² Eph. ii. 13, 17.

the two really go together—that other thought of the quickening power of Him Who died and rose again, and ever liveth, to be the Intercessor in Heaven, the Ministrant on earth, for all who love and fear Him. “If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His SON, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His Life.”¹ Little by little, the old sins which overcame us shall give way to the graces of His often-sought Communion, and growth in grace shall drive out habits of sin, and the love of God shall purify our love for others, and CHRIST’S strength be made perfect in our weakness. Thus the HOLY SPIRIT whom He sent unto us from the FATHER, and who, amid all His works for us, and by them all, is ever testifying of our LORD, will be gradually sanctifying us, keeping before us that spotless unclouded Light, and changing us “into the same Image from glory to glory.”² And thus our LORD Himself will be formed within us more and more, and through His Presence, awful as it is, we shall be approaching that which otherwise no man can approach unto, and daring to behold the Eternal FATHER, Whom, except in the Incarnate SON, we cannot see. Is there not a still more wonderful blessing declared to us by that same “LORD of glory”—that same Bosom-friend of ours—that same “Mediator between God and men?” “If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My

¹ Rom. v. 10.² 2 Cor. iii. 18.

FATHER will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."¹

Be it ours thus to learn obedience, even though it be through suffering, that so He may raise us nearer to Himself through His strange and merciful visitations, and empower us to keep close to Him, still, patient, diligent, and without fear.

Only, brethren, let there also be found in us a thorough repentance for having hitherto made so little use of that strengthening, elevating aid of His—an earnest healthful sorrow for that tardy progress which He can trace in us towards "that good and acceptable and perfect will of God,"² that conscientious cross-bearing imitation of Him. So shall we gain, as true penitents and obedient followers, the thorough comfort of those cheering words of His prophet, conveying to us His own most blessed promise: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose Name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."³

¹ S. John xiv. 23.

² Rom. xii. 2.

³ Isa. lvii. 15.

XXVI.

SLOW PROGRESS.

PSALM CXIX. 52.

*"My soul cleaveth unto the dust : quicken Thou me according to
Thy word."*

IT is the Christian's delight to draw nigh unto God. In worship, in acts of belief, in Sacramental communion, in searching the Scriptures, in speaking often to those who fear and love that glorious Name, he counts it his wonderful privilege to have access to the Holy One. Each loss lifts him up to the treasure-house of countervailing gain, each grief contains its germ of joy, as it impels him heavenward, each Cross raiseth him nearer to God. Yet His Light reveals our darkness ; and the bright beings who are round about His Throne, unfallen in their created beauty and order, put us unworthy sinners to shame as we see even them in the celestial places, and are fain to hide our eyes before the flaming fire of those who are but ministering spirits in His Presence. The onward march of the heavenly host, the swift obedience of those angels of God who

do His pleasure, become more evident to us the nearer we approach by faith and holiness to our LORD; and our own life seems more out of tune with those higher harmonies, more inconsistent with the dignity of the post allowed us in the ranks of the blessed company. Nor is it merely that after our participations of the Eucharist we feel ourselves cold in comparison of the burning fervour of the Seraphim, but that, independently of our feelings which in this earthly tabernacle we must expect to vary, our progress towards perfection is so slow. How tardy is our victory over the sin which doth so easily beset us! how imperceptible our growth in grace! how far behind is the soul, when the body at least is nearer to its end! what a contrast there is between the promise of the morning and the fulfilment of the day!

This, to one who is in earnest, may well be a matter for grave anxiety and disquietude: and the fact that, in the midst of questionings and speculations, there remains in all true followers of JESUS this personal, penitent, frequently-recurring care, does show what a real thing the Christian life is, and how much greater and more powerful are its Divine instincts than its human doubts, its sense of duty towards God and its desires to serve Him, than its occasional misgivings about His nature, His grace, His teachings, or His reward.

All around him the Christian finds, daily and

hourly, confirmations of this felt need of a more decided spiritual advance. The up-springing of a buried seed, the ceaseless course of the seasons, the marvellous inventions and developments of the mind of man, the strange and fearful growth even of his outward limbs, the increasing self-devotion of the saints which he, himself unsaintly, is constrained to witness and confess, the extraordinary preservation and furtherance of the Church, amid the difficulties of persecution and the greater dangers of prosperity, the attacks of infidelity and the hindrances of division, the way in which the whole creation moves to one far-off Divine event—all these warn, exhort, persuade, encourage him to be constantly astir in the things which pertain unto God, constantly going forward, pressing forward in the unseen work of his own true self.

What matter if there be dissuasive voices? he must at least be moving: or the temptations of a retrograde society? he dare not be held back: or the downward allurements of sense? he must still rise above them: or the chains of earthly affection? he must draw those he loves with him to JESUS CHRIST: or the fear that the time is very short? so much the more diligent must be his exertion: or the suggestion that the race is not for him? so much the more quickly—with every weight laid aside—must he run for Him Who called him, and Whom he knows to be “the God of all grace.”

And yet how often the disciple must lament with him, who though a man of God, was also a man of like passions with us, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust!" It is not merely the heavy heart, but the sluggish will, which has the earth about it everywhere, and finds it so difficult to climb the narrow way of peace, and to finish those spiritual labours for which we have but a little while, and which must be done, together with our common duties, with all our might. Nay! let us never forget the difference; for a heavy heart may be gladdened and revived after a short night, but a sluggish will might forfeit for us the joys which are for ever. But on the other hand, we shall do well to remember that whereas the feelings of the heart change according to the good pleasure of God, and are not generally chargeable to ourselves, the exercise of the will is free to all of us, and we can go forth and accomplish, this very day, a portion of the journey which brings us straight to Heaven. And therefore this slow progress of ours is not so much, like many others, a trial of our patience as a memorial of our responsibility, a reminder of the necessity which is upon us now to be more resolute in our devotion to God, more intent, in what we own to be real life, on His kingdom and His work.

None the less on that account should some words of help be offered to those who are inclined to lose heart about themselves, fancying that because they

are not at home, they never will be, and because they are not already perfect, it is useless for them to attempt going on unto perfection. The minister of CHRIST, at all events, cannot be so ignorant of Satan's devices as to let him gain such an advantage over those who are seeking eternal life, but whom he would try either to ruin by the pride of having seemingly attained, or to discourage from the great enterprise for which man was created, by making them despair of final perseverance. Let us honestly, and without partiality for ourselves, ask our own conscience these simple questions as to our progress. God will enable us to answer them, and will give us peace or admonition accordingly.

1. Is our progress, though slow, real? The steps of the lame and the blind are not speedy, but the home is entered at length, because it is being sought by that darkened yet upturned countenance, those faltering yet moving feet. Steady, quiet, watchful, thoughtful walking brings the traveller to his distant resting-place, rather than hasty, careless, occasional, rushings forward, under the passing influence of a momentary and fatiguing enthusiasm. We do not arrive at either the spiritual light or the intellectual knowledge of heaven by the spasmodic efforts, or the specially fervent desires, of an hour or a year.

"The heights by great men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight,

But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upwards in the night."¹

We might be taken up with the indolent pleasures of the world, engrossed by its benumbing cares, utterly absorbed by its vain fashions, which gradually deaden men and women to the voice and will of Almighty God. Are we rather, regardless of these shadows, seeking that which lasts and is substantial? Are we rather caring passionately about the finding of CHRIST? Are we intently listening for His words, asking what He would have us do, going, day after day, to work in His vineyard, and trying to do that work better, more faithfully, more heartily, more thoroughly, *every* day?

2. But again, is there, as an accompaniment of this, true self-denial. For (believe it, as the fruit of experience) without this our spiritual progress cannot be real. Even in the world, with all its ultimate selfishness, little can be done except by present sacrifice of self. The golden image cannot be made for it to worship, if there be not a haste to rise up early, a readiness to take rest late, a careful economy even of bread, a practised temperance in the eyes of men. Is it so in perishing things, and can it be otherwise with eternal interests, and in the Presence of that heart-searching LORD, Who bids us deny ourselves daily if we would go after Him? Indeed, this is one sure test of our sincerity, gauging the measure

¹ Longfellow: "The Ladder of S. Augustine."

of our increasing love for God and man. . Apart from this, what proof have we that ours is anything more than a respectable religion, which enables us perhaps to do many things in the Name of the LORD JESUS, but does not constrain us to bear our cross, to forsake some gain for the good of others, to sacrifice for God's House or for God's poor, that which really costs us something—in short, to spend and be spent for God, to live unto Him instead of living and dying unto ourselves? Our hearts, as we know too well, are so deceitful that there may be a semblance of this grace without the reality; a bestowing of all our goods to feed the poor, without that charity which makes us devote our souls and bodies; an act of desperate heroism in the forlorn hope, without the death unto sin for CHRIST. Is it not very different when, instead of choosing our own way, we keep to His, forsaking just what He bids us now forsake, foregoing the one pleasure, the one appetite, He would have us forego to-day, taking that very step forward which we cannot at this moment take with ease, but which we can learn to take laboriously and painfully for the love of Him?

3. But we see at once how far this is removed either from the notice or the praise of men; and it brings us to inquire of ourselves whether we may humbly trust that, in the sight of God, we are moving forward. Is there a *secret* advance in the life of faith, the labour of love, the patience of hope—in

whatsoever makes up the character of a Christian soldier, the conduct of a Christian pilgrim? Growth is as much underground as above; and even when the tender blade appears, putting forth the ripening ear, it "cometh not with observation."¹ Great and strange issues are unfolded from the processes of a hidden life. Hear a missionary's parable, much to be remembered by us all.² In Tinnevely, so sandy, so barren seems the soil, that one could hardly expect any sort of vegetation, any shelter from the sun or

¹ S. Luke xvii. 20.

² See Caldwell's Lectures, pp. 35—37. "No kind of cultivation involves so little trouble or expense as that of the palmyra. The nut has merely to be cast into the sand and loosely covered over. . . . Sometimes, for two or three years, no trace of the young palmyra appears above ground: it might be supposed to have perished, but it is busily occupied in working its way downwards in search of water. After about twenty years of neglect this wonderful tree begins to requite its owner for benefits which it never received. It is remarkable that the palmyra yields its sweet juice, (the chief food of the natives,) not during, or at the close of, the rainy season, when it might be expected to be full of sap, but during the hottest period of the year, when the heat is so great and so continuous that every blade of grass disappears from the parched soil. . . . I have dug down through the sandy soil to see where this copious supply of sap came from, and have found the long, stringy roots of the palmyra penetrating right down to a depth of forty feet beneath the surface. There I found them drinking in perpetual draughts of water in the secret springs and channels that lie far beneath the surface of the ground, where the greatest droughts never reach. Even at that depth I found that they penetrated still lower into interstices amongst the rocks, where I could follow them no longer." After remarking on this as a very striking illustration of the wisdom

refreshment from the drought. Yet there are vast palm-trees there, affording abundant shade and support for man. How did they get their life? how are they nourished? how could they become such a blessing as they are to the people who dwell under their branches? From the buried palm-nut a slender root struck down deeper and deeper, thirty or forty feet beneath the surface: at last it came upon the living rock and the quickening waters, and then it drew up the moisture into the growing substance of the stem, and made it, like its fellows, a mighty giant of the forest, spreading out a leafy canopy, and enabling men to encamp and build and live beneath it. So deep, so secret, so gradual, must be the progress of the Christian's inner life. There must be a work thoroughly in the heart, unmarked, save in its effect, by men, bringing the soul little by little down to the very Rock. For that Rock is CHRIST, and all our fresh springs must be in Him, and from Him there will well up into all our deeds and words the grace and beauty of His holiness and glory, to make us plenteous in goodness and truth, fruitful for God and man, most unworthy indeed in ourselves, but in the LORD fulfilling the prophecy of the Psalmist which

of Divine Providence, Dr. Caldwell goes on to say that he has sometimes reminded the people of the appropriate expression in the Tamil rendering of Ps. xcii. 11, quoted below, of the root of faith shooting deep down into the Love of God, and "the supply of the SPIRIT of JESUS CHRIST."

he spake, "The righteous shall flourish like a palm-tree."¹

4. And if, though we realize this union—itsself offered to us even from the time of our Baptism—we yet are conscious that our growth, after all, is still too slow, are we taking its imperfections, day by day, to Him Who alone can make the poor labours of man acceptable with God? Ours are at best but stunted proportions beside "the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST:"² and as we recollect His countless bestowals, His daily mercies, His past and present endeavours to revive our drooping hearts, we must in truth feel abashed at the miserable measure of our upgrowth, and our scanty returns to His grace. May God regard not our unworthiness, but His merits, and while He pardons what is past may He teach us to look upon ourselves as rooted and grounded in CHRIST, not only empowered but urged for our very life to increase in His love, and to bring forth the manifold fruits of His HOLY SPIRIT more and more! In that Beloved Son this grovelling soul rises above the thirsty, wearying, weakening, sands of the world; and it finds the way, though narrow, not impossible, nor even grievous. To take up the more familiar metaphor of the Sacred Scriptures, we learn, as we run forward, to look to JESUS, to behold in Him Who is the Author, the Finisher also of our faith, to trust Him Who has begun the good

¹ Ps. xcii. 12.

² Eph. iv. 13.

work in us, as the One, the only One, Who can perform it.¹

In His Name, let our prayer go up a ceaseless, fervent, loving, humble prayer, that prayer which, though in other language, all the nations of them that are saved, all the hearts of those who were really anxious for their souls, have uttered before God :
“ Quicken Thou me in Thy way.”

Surely He will do so, for it is according to His word.

¹ Heb. xii. 1, 2 ; Phil. i. 6.

XXVII.

THE WORLD'S REJECTION OF THE CRUCIFIED.

1 COR. I. 18.

"The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness."

THE quicker God enables us to run, and the keener becomes our gaze in faith upon CHRIST which strengtheneth us, the more sadly must we lament, in the depth of our own awakened love, the unwillingness of men and women all around us, to join us in the Christian race, or even to believe in Him, Who is not only gracious to us, but exceeding precious. And though that sorrow must grow more poignant in those who are able, by their high position or their peculiar saintliness, to take a wide survey of the corruption and infidelity prevailing on the earth, yet every earnest Christian, be he ever so lowly, ever so little known, be his view of "them that are without"¹ ever so much contracted, must experience, again and again, that sense of depression and

¹ 1 Cor. v. 13.

disappointment, which, arises from the conviction that the Life and Death, the Salvation and Grace, already so dear to him, are matters of absolute indifference to thousands of his brethren according to the flesh.

The opposition of the world to the Church and her doctrine is, we well know, one of the greatest of all the palpable sufferings which Christians must endure. But we are thinking of secret trials, as they concern the soul in the depth of its personality with God; and so it is not so much the battle array of the whole Church, as she sets herself—army against army—to meet her many adversaries, as the attitude of the individual Churchman, with which we have now to do, in considering the contemptuous refusal rendered by so many to the all-merciful yet heart-searching claims of CHRIST.

Each true disciple, just because he is true, realizes this as a sorrow of his own. It weighs upon his soul. It meets him in the experiences of daily life. It checks, at intervals, the inner flow of that unutterable joy which is otherwise sustained by the steady faith, and constant service, and jubilant voice of the Holy Catholic Church. As he is appalled by the thought of the future portion of the ungodly and the unbeliever, so in their present hatred of the truth as it is in JESUS, and in their present disregard of "the SPIRIT and the Water and the Blood,"¹ he finds, not

¹ 1 S. John v. 8.

matter for controversy, but a cause of deep personal grief. To see grown-up men continuing unbaptized and thereby proving themselves ashamed of the Death of CHRIST, to mark the multitudes who deliberately, week after week for years, decline to show that Death by partaking of His Blessed Sacrament, to hear the blasphemies spoken of Him by those who would give the whole world, in a few days, to have His Cross, in all its power, held before their closing eyes, to feel the coldness with which a selfish generation treats the notion of studying, fasting, praying, working in the companionship of the LORD Who died for us—all this, and we meet it on all sides, is fraught, for the lovers of God, with intense and absorbing pain.

Notice, first, how much this was to be expected: and then, what should be the course of every one of us under the trial, if we would draw from it a blessing for ourselves and others.

1. This rejection, therefore, which grieves us so much, is but a following out, in each age of the Church's education, of that enmity and unconcern displayed towards the SAVIOUR, from the actual beginning of His Human Ministry. According to that pathetic complaint of His Gospel, "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not."¹ Revealed, I do not say, from His very cradle, but long before by the an-

¹ S. John i. 10.

nouncements of prophecy, as the Great King, He was yet ever experiencing, from first to last, the rebellious hatred of His citizens, and day after day encountered their message, "We will not have this Man to reign over us."¹ And even after He had begun His triumph from the Tree, even after He had shown Himself the Conqueror of Death, even after He had ascended up on high, "King of kings and LORD of lords,"² even after His kingdom was established on earth in such a way and with such a Presence, that nothing could prevail against it for ever,—the manifested power of His quickening SPIRIT, the constraining influence of His Royal Word, was still repelled by those who put it from them, and judged themselves "unworthy of everlasting life."³ When the Apostles preached "CHRIST crucified," it was "to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness."⁴ They were but types of that world which, in its imperfect religion, loved not, and in its boasted wisdom knew not, God—that world which saw indeed a Light approaching to it, but still "loved darkness rather than light, because" its "deeds were evil."⁵

But again, this infidelity of the world was more than a proof of its wickedness; for that wickedness found its deepest debasement therein. It was to be

¹ S. Luke xix. 14.

² Rev. xix. 13, 16.

³ Acts xiii. 46.

⁴ 1 Cor. i. 23.

⁵ S. John iii. 19.

a part of the office of the HOLY GHOST to reprove or convict the world of sin ; and why ? In our LORD's own words, " Of sin, because they believe not on Me."¹ When God had " sent His SON into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved,"² it became doubly impious for the unclean, the drunkard, the persecutor, the passionate, the untruthful, the proud, the covetous, to continue in their sins as if there were no SAVIOUR for them. What more deadly than for alien and apostate soldiers to keep with the rebel hosts, when the Great Leader of the armies that are in Heaven stands out in full view of their lines, to be even to them, if they will come forth, the Captain of their salvation ? What more hateful to God, than for those who were separated from Him both by a fallen nature and by evil works, to reject the one hope which He offers them, of a new birth and a holy life ? What more terrible, than to accept the borrowed and imperfect sayings of philosophers, and yet to make God a liar, by not believing " the record that God gave of His SON ?"³ How can self-deceit, self-destruction, be more complete ? Of old too it had been the fool who said in his heart, " There is no God."⁴ And unbelief in the SON of GOD must really be the self-same folly, the self-same crowning sin : for " he that honoureth not the SON, honoureth not the

¹ S. John xvi. 7—9.² S. John iii. 17.³ 1 S. John v. 10.⁴ Ps. xiv. 1.

FATHER which hath sent Him.”¹ In either case, it was not that they could not, but that they would not take the evidence as sufficient; it was not that they could not, but that they would not go to Him which loved them: “Ye do not will to come unto Me, that ye might have life.”²

And, further, the world, with its will thus perverted, rejects CHRIST, not simply because it does not believe intellectually in His right to its worship and affection; but because it does not spiritually discern Him, as the object of its thankful, trustful faith. Its mind is of the earth, governed by the things which are seen, and therefore not quick to discern eternal things, nor even to seek after them. And so the depths of heavenly wisdom could not be uttered to it, since, being carnal, it is not fitted to assimilate them: as with the individual, so with the class, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the SPIRIT of GOD, for they are foolishness unto him.”³ Much less can such persons render to the SAVIOUR the homage of a grateful heart for His unspeakable gift, or confide in Him amid all difficulties, or devote themselves to Him with a zeal that sanctifies the fulfilment of common duties. For CHRIST is not the Centre of their life.

And so, as it does not look, in all things, at Him and His strange act on Calvary, the World turns

¹ S. John v. 23. Cf. xii. 44.

² οὐ θέλετε ἔρχεσθαι πρὸς με. S. John v. 40.

³ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

habitually away, because it abhors self-sacrifice. And thus much it knows, that self-sacrifice must be practised by all who would accept for themselves, heartily and unreservedly, the fellowship of CHRIST's religion. Nay, so far from denying themselves, even in the faintest imitation of Him, they will not so much as surrender a sin. Rather, the very fact that He rebukes them for their misdeeds, arouses their enmity against Him: as He said, eighteen hundred years ago, to those who were of His family but not of His SPIRIT, "The world cannot hate you; but Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil,"¹ even so we may expect it still. Are there not countless baptized Christians, who leave their LORD because they think His sayings hard? That, surely, is what the faithful feel so keenly, that which sifts them so fearfully. How they are gathering together from every side against the LORD and against His Anointed!

2. And yet, in view of this great defection, this desertion even of enrolled soldiers from the army of the Cross, our LORD still asks of us who name His Name, asks of us one by one, often when we are thoroughly alone: "Will ye also go away?"²

The Church or the world—we have no choice but that: the world with its pleasures of sense for a season, its pleasures of discovery, with unfathomable deeps beyond, its pleasures of wealth unsatisfying

¹ S. John vii. 7.

² S. John vi. 60, 66, 67.

even to the mind of man, let alone his immortal soul, its pleasures of honour perishing as we use it, and making faith impossible,¹ its pleasures of memory, without one hope of that which is to come: *or*, the Church, with its remembrance of CHRIST, its union with CHRIST, its hope in CHRIST—the Church, with its honour that cometh from God only, through His Beloved SON—the Church, with its unsearchable riches springing from the LORD's marvellous poverty—the Church, with the glorious revelations made in Him—the Church, with its present peace which passeth all understanding, as imparted by Him, and its increasing assurance, as “the testimony of JESUS” gradually unfolds itself in the fulfilment of prophecy,² that in Him at God's Right Hand it shall find “pleasure for evermore”—the world or the Church. The Christian's choice is made, and he cannot waver from it, even though at times he does not fully understand the way of CHRIST, the mystery of His Incarnation, the Life of His Cross, or the glory of His Resurrection. To whom should he go, but to Him? he has indeed but faith, he “cannot know, for knowledge is of things we see;”³ yet, he believes, and is, so far, sure,⁴ that JESUS is the CHRIST so much needed, so long foretold, the One Being capable of doing that stupendous work which has been done, through faith in His Blessed Name.

¹ S. John v. 44.

² Rev. xiv. 10.

³ “In Memoriam.”

⁴ S. John vi. 69.

300 THE WORLD'S REJECTION OF THE CRUCIFIED.

Let us also say to one another, "Cast not away your confidence." Though before you and behind you and beside you there are those who separate themselves from CHRIST and His Passion, and though here and there you meet even with His brethren who will walk with Him no more, let not these things move you. Trust still in Him, Whom you have regarded hitherto, and Who has not failed you in those special seasons of anxiety and distress which would have made you, in the judgment of the world, utterly miserable. Ask Him only to increase your faith, and to make it depend not on the countenance of men, but on the promises of God. And then, whatever happens, you will cling to the Crucified, and to His saving truth.

And then, next, as the whole of that truth will be dear to you, you will compromise no part of it, either to menace or to enticement, either to open enemies or half-hearted friends. Uphold the standard fearlessly, defend it to the utmost of your power, carry it forward for the space of time allotted you, always with charity, never with the fear of men, and the Son of God will not forsake you.

Thus you may even win some out of the world, even as the saints of old conquered and converted many of its children by their very boldness and perseverance in CHRIST's cause. The men of the world despise, oppose, reject, blaspheme that worthy Name. The faithful press on—argue not with words, but

with the holiness and humility of their lives—show what patience can do, and cheerfulness, and simplicity, and ceaseless prayer—and win, with some at least, the victory.

For, remember, the SPIRIT of GOD is still working in the world. He which convicts, convinces also. Saul of Tarsus, awe-struck at the sudden revelation of his own persecutions of JESUS, is drawn afterwards by the bands of love to be His prisoner,¹ rejoicing to be persecuted himself,² and to labour more abundantly than all for that faith which once he had destroyed.³ And so the Church is still encouraged to go forward, by that old promise of CHRIST concerning her adversaries and His: "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."⁴ Where could you find more striking representatives of the pomp and pride and glory of the world than in ancient Rome? Yet see how the chief names of her former grandeur—the *Scipios*, the *Gracchi*, the *Camilli*—re-appear in the History of the Christian Church, as her humble and therefore exalted children. Nor were these merely decayed scions of a once flourishing stem; witness the family of the *Anicii*, which having been amongst the noblest in the best times of the Republic, was still, even in the fourth century, the richest and most powerful in the city of the Cæsars,

¹ Eph. iii. 1.

² 2 Cor. xii. 10.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 10; Gal. i. 23.

⁴ Rev. iii. 9.

and yet was the very one which produced "the two greatest personages of the monastic order, S. Benedict and S. Gregory the Great."¹ Truly God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the wise, making them to become fools for CHRIST's sake that they *might* be wise.² Let that experience, renewed as it has been again and again, constrain us to confess Him among men, and to show that, as our belief is real to ourselves, we hold it forth as a blessing to them. Those whom we least expected may return to give honour to God, by accepting the salvation of His Son.

But, finally, whether or no, devote yourself more and more to the service of Him whom you own as your Redeemer. It is not the many, but the few, who enter the Kingdom. Let no man persuade you to stand aloof with the many, from the few who are intent upon the Crucified, and who behold in Him the earnest of their crown. Draw ever nearer to that marred and glorious Figure, in whom you see, though sometimes through your sins but darkly, the One Only Hope of your sinful body and your fallen soul. They are perishing apart from Him; and if you go further on the way that leadeth to destruction, it is God's own will that His Cross should seem to you mere foolishness. But now there is a power in that Death, a sweetness in that Life, to draw you

¹ See M. de Montalembert's "Monks of the West," vol. i. p. 391.

² 1 Cor. i. 27.

heavenward. Yield to 'it, and you will learn for yourself, how blessed it is, above all gifts of the world, to be crucified with CHRIST. For then, since He is risen to die no more, He will be living in you, and even when your eyes are closing in death, you will find that He has "the words of Eternal Life."¹

¹ S. John vi. 68.

XXVIII.

OUR UNHAPPY DIVISIONS.

1 COR. I. 13.

"Is Christ divided?"

IF the coldness and enmity shown by the world towards CHRIST wears and hinders and harasses the Christian, how deeply must he be pained by the disunion and the strife, too prevalent among the disciples of Him Who came to make them all one in Himself! If the indifference and infidelity of those who are without drives us into the inner citadel of the sanctuary of God, how terrible it is to find even within, amid many tokens of real belief and hearty worship, the distracting sights and sounds of a divided Church! Separation and party spirit seem bad enough in the common matters of every-day life, in the jealousies between class and class, the contentions between master and man, the bickerings of those who are of one flesh, the mutual hatred of those whose interests are really the same, but who are not satisfied to live and let live. Even in such cases, (and

how frequent they are!) the lookers on are cut to the heart, and would do all in their power to bring in, instead of this variance, sincere and lasting friendship, considerate forbearance, and trustful goodwill. But would not a heathen bystander have had much the same thoughts and desires? Is it not infinitely worse, is it not enough to make the very heathen keep aloof from us, when the actual Household of God, the Body of CHRIST, the Temple of the One HOLY SPIRIT, presents such a spectacle as that of living stones plucked asunder, disjointed members, servants owning the same Master, but not sympathizing with each other? It is from this that the Church is suffering, day by day; it is from this that she seeks to be delivered; it is for this that in the collective life of her many branches she desires a remedy; it is this that is so terribly brought home to her by the attacks which call for a more vigorous defence of the faith, the disorders, which when repressed in one place break out in another, the rebelliousness which lacks, not indeed common rules, but a common spirit of discipline.

But we are not considering now the trial of the Church in general, though we know how great this must be for her who should be Catholic and one, nor even that of her bishops and her priests, who have received an office and a work, not merely in the spiritual community of a district or a country, but "in the Church of God," and who have solemnly

promised and vowed "to maintain and set forward, as much as lieth in" them "quietness, peace, and love, among all Christian people."¹ Rather, it is the personal sense, the personal pain, of these unhappy divisions, as experienced by individuals, each, in his own proper sphere and place, regarding the problem not from a political, but from a religious point of view, out of the full heart of one who loves the LORD JESUS CHRIST in sincerity, and who desires that, in Him and for His sake, we should all love and serve one another. There may be more profit than we think in looking at the trial in this way. For the regrets, and agonies, and energies of single Christians are not really isolated. Their prayers and tears and labours run together with those of a thousand other sympathetic souls into the Great Heart of Him in Whom we are truly one; and the stream of spiritual life, with all its sorrows and sufferings, its throbbing wishes and its aching cares, flows freely on from the members here to the members there, till each feeble part is recognized and valued in its grief. Nor is even its rejoicing in hope forgotten, or left to be spent on lonely expectations, but quietly communicates itself to others, so that they rejoice with it, and with it dare to look forward to the better times of peace and concord, which shall hereafter be granted to the earth. And knowing this, some of you will not refuse to hear the thoughts

¹ See the Ordinal.

of one little qualified, save by the HOLY GHOST's commission, to teach the brethren.

I. Let us, then, try to analyse the distress of this special trial, which if not necessarily incident to the Christian life, has at least practically accompanied it, in numberless instances, ever since that question was asked by the Apostle as to the Church which was at Corinth : " Is CHRIST divided ? "

We feel at the outset, what a strange, mysterious thing it is ; how little to be expected, after the wonderful self-sacrifice of the SON of GOD ; how alien from the teaching of His Gospel of peace ; how contrary to our own continual profession of faith in our SAVIOUR, to our own constant hope of that one Home above. Then, too, it adds so much to our difficulties and perplexities : there are so many voices around us. The world, of course, is like the inquiring Pilate, and does not wait for an answer ;¹ but we need one, it is a matter of life and death to us, we are anxious about the truth, it is this only that can make us free ; we know that our Blessed LORD was born on purpose to bear witness to this : yet there is such a Babel round the Cross, that even His Word seems, at times, indistinct to us.

And though to some of us the lessons from the lips of Him Who spake as never man spake, have no uncertain sound, and the doctrines of the Church, which He founded, have, with the Scriptures, absolute

¹ See Lord Bacon's *Essays*.

authority, yet even so, how sore we feel at the opposing fancies and private judgments of men, and how deeply we grieve over the superstitions on this side, the cavillings on that, which hide from weary souls the consoling gifts of God !

And again, there are all the practical hindrances caused by division—the time and temper lost in controversy, the waste of power, the ministrations proper to one necessarily occupying many, while elsewhere, through this very thing, the work of many has to be done by one ; the foreign missions of the LORD, as supported by these islands alone—perhaps the chief duty in which we might all agree—promoted by no less than sixty different societies ; at home, the parochial agencies, multiplied not in love but in rivalry ; the deceitfulness engendered in the needy, through the natural inclination to stand well with all ; the pride of party leaders, desirous, though at the cost of a fresh schism, of a following ; the tendency, so inherent in us all, to strive for personal triumph more than for the truth of God ; the dissensions, or at best the lack of sympathy between members of the same family, between husband and wife, brother and sister, father and son. These are not imaginations, they are facts, weighing heavily on the Christian's mind.

And once more, and to sum up all, there are the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions, the peril involved in the lack of charity, the peril to

the perishing masses of our population, the peril to a country, of "holding no form of creed, yet contemplating all," the peril to the watchful heathen, the observant Japanese, or the critical Hindoo, of having no body of divinity, no thorough system of religion, no exhaustive claims presented to them by nations conversant with CHRIST for centuries; the peril—ever nearer day by day—of having to meet, with a divided front, and a disputed command, and disorganized ranks, the advancing host of the infidel army, strong, if in nothing else, at least in the unity of unbelief. O, how terrible to the Christian soldier, as he prepares himself on his knees and in the armoury of the SPIRIT, for his own humble part in the approaching battle, to feel, that through this disunion, he may be marching not to victory, but to defeat! How fearful, that there should not be so much as peace in our Jerusalem, when war is threatened against us round about!

II. Are there any consolations for a man under this peculiarly scathing trial? Assuredly there are. Over and above the comforting thought, drawn from the Word of God itself, that if the Christian, in his own appointed place, does what he can for unity and holds the Head, in a life of faith and love, he shall stand in his lot at the end—over and above this gift of personal hope, he will be helped by such reflections as these.

1. "God is not the Author of confusion, but of

peace."¹ For such confusion is in itself an evil, and therefore contrary to the Will and the Nature of God. He Who came to throw down "the middle wall of partition" between the two great sections of mankind, so as "to make in Himself of twain One New Man,"² desired that there should be no more such barriers to separate His own, His purchased people. In one sense, indeed, He came to bring a sword on earth, but only as marking off decisively those who would believe in Him, from those who would not. For all who should believe on Him, His Prayer was this—never to be forgotten by us, either in the bosom of the Church or in the face of the world—"That they all may be one; as Thou, FATHER, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us:" and why? "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."³ Clearly, then, this awful obstacle to His petition, this great advantage which Satan has gotten over us, is merely permitted, like the trial of Job or the temptation of the SAVIOUR Himself. This does not of course enable us thoroughly to comprehend the mystery; but it at least prevents us from being impatient under the affliction.

2. For, next, it is but for a time. Divisions are among the things which pass away. If, even in our own chequered days, we see men here and there

¹ 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

² Eph. ii. 14, 15.

³ S. John xvii. 21.

already drawing together, understanding each other better, worshipping in the House of God as friends, foregoing at all events the harshness and bitterness, the contempt and ridicule, so thoroughly out of place in matters of true religion, may we not look forward, as to a very certain issue, to the reconciliation of the East and the West, to the spiritual embrace of Jew and Gentile under the Redeemer's Cross, to the glorious season when brethren in blood shall be brethren also in faith, when the Church shall no longer be an object of jealousy nor a cause of offence, but as a mother restored to those who had dissented from her, when "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim?"¹ Our perplexities will be solved after a while, and all who care for CHRIST will be listening silently for His glorious Voice.

3. But, further, if we think of this as a passing trial, we shall not fail to recollect that it has a purpose; and that therefore when the purpose is accomplished, the trial shall be taken away. It is our LORD's desire that we should be one; and so, as soon as the work is finished which He meant to be done by this scourge, we shall be one. Here in England, for example, "a careless ministry and a careless people" had to be corrected.² Can any one, however cautious in his testimony, doubt that a fire of

¹ Isa. xi. 13.

² See Bp. Armstrong's "Pastor in the Closet." (Thursday.)

God has rekindled our zeal? Can any one, however anxious for the future, deny the wave of movement visible now? There has been, and in this exact order, (which is much to be observed,) a revival first of faith, then of life, last of worship. Must not these three bring about, in the Providence of God, a revival also of union?

4. We have already the seed of this plant—the beginning of this assembly—the nucleus of this constellation, in the Church of the living God. When it is purified by the Divine fire, warmed by the glow of love for our Common LORD, enlightened by the steady flame of the HOLY SPIRIT's abiding Presence, it must surely serve to bring us together. Whether we would set it free from secular control, or would rather keep up its own spiritual influence over empires and republics, we can most of us account it one of the main bulwarks against unbelief, the chief shelter under the great Rock, for souls wearied with new things and craving rest. Whatever we mean by the Church, (and History, if we will but be ingenuous with ourselves, will tell us what we ought to mean thereby,) we should recognize in it that one Body, which is moved by one SPIRIT, and constrained by one hope, which worships the one LORD, and professes the one faith, and is perpetuated by the one Baptism;¹ and herein, if in anything, we shall find the possibility of rejoining those who

¹ Eph. iv. 5.

have walked, like ourselves too often, in self-chosen ways.

III. Bearing these consolations in mind, and finding thus a decided answer to the Apostle's question, we may go on lastly to see what may be the remedies proper to that condition in which the trial places us. Will you prove these for yourselves? and will you, if in what has now been said, you have learnt even a very little as to the perilous character of this discord, consider whether they may not be some help for you when you are quite alone?

1. First, we must not abandon pure doctrine, the truth of CHRIST, for the sake of peace. So might we lose in turn all the precious articles of our creed, and come to be despised by those very persons whom our faithfulness might have raised from an honest belief which was partial to an honest belief which is full. It is not by compromise but by steadfastness that we can win souls wisely. Which of us cannot testify that he has learnt truth sometimes in spite of himself, through its strict and unflinching declaration by another who taught us when we imagined ourselves in need of no such teaching?

2. Again, we must not only openly avow our faith, we must also act upon it. More is done, depend upon it, for unity, by those who go on quietly and constantly in the Holy Communion, than by those who argue well, but who forsake that best assembling of themselves together. If we, being

many, are indeed to be One Body, it must be by our all partaking of that one Bread.¹ A greater advance is made towards the joy of that day when, in CHRIST, all His people shall be righteous and therefore one, by the increasing holiness of those who have thus received Him, than by the many words of those who though for a space enthusiastic communicants, do not persuade men by a consistent Christian life. It is the converse of a saint, albeit in a different religious body from ours, which wins our sympathy, and so attracts him to us, to fill up that which was lacking in his faith, or to impart to us that which could complete our own.

3. Thus again we shall see the real duty and value of gentleness towards others—of holding the truth in love—and so “endeavouring to keep the unity of the SPIRIT in the bond of peace.”² Do not indeed let us acquiesce in these divisions—do not let us be content to hear one say, “I am of Paul,” or ourselves to say to others, “I am of Apollos;” nor let us suppose that we are sure to be free from schism, if we presume to count ourselves independent of any teachers by declaring “I am of CHRIST.”³ This very profession was censured by the inspired Paul, and the words which immediately follow are those which we are keeping before us, “Is CHRIST divided?” Yet while we thoroughly avoid such terms and such se-

¹ 1 Cor. x. 17.

² Eph. iv. 3.

³ 1 Cor. i. 12.

parations ourselves, and do our best to check them in others, let us learn to be tender to consciences and mindful of the religious habits of a life-time.

4. And so, whether in disputing with others, or in communing with ourselves, whether we sigh for the restoration of a lost doctrine, or for the binding together of this scattered Christendom, let us remember the touching counsel of an aged archbishop, unruffled by the difficulties which beset the up-hill course of Catholic truth—*Calmness must be our defence*.¹ Be it ours to wait upon God though the clouds be many, and the storms alarming, and the band of watchers on the walls of Zion but a very little company. Behold! they are gathering together even now—"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."²

5. Far better thus to wait, with a trustful spirit, than to be impatient of those in authority because we fancy that they are not promoting, in the way which commends itself to *us*, the re-union of the Church. It is not merely that "when our duty is submission, stubborn opposition betokens pride,"³ but also that the actual object of our desires will be fulfilled the sooner, if we advance on God's lines rather than on our own. He has providentially set a centre of unity in every diocese, to help forward that which we have so thoroughly at heart. Let us not

¹ Archbishop Van Loos' address at the Old Catholic Congress.

² Isa. xxx. 15.

³ Hooker.

ignore this, even when we are pained by apparently slow progress. The Episcopate is quickened, not by unseemly antagonism, but by the general life of the Church. Are we in the priesthood? let our harmony spring from its Divine foundation, in obedience to the all but apostolic saying of S. Ignatius; "The presbytery are fitted to the bishop, as the chords to a lute."¹ Are we of the laity? let us learn to look each upon his own bishop as a spiritual father,² who will foster, if we will only aid him, true love and friendship among all his sons and daughters in the LORD. Surely such practical union in our Zion will restore to us the unwilling wanderers of the Family of God.

6. There is but one more thought: yet to a Christian surely it comes, however old, with a fresh power every day. Let us *pray* for the peace of our Jerusalem—for thorough unity among ourselves—for concord, through agreement in the truth, with all around us. The vision is not yet. But it is a blessed encouragement to us to know, that there is ascending up on every side around us, from unknown brethren as from trusted friends, from little children

¹ S. Ignatius ad Eph. 4.

² It is of course perfectly true, that most of our English dioceses are now too large to allow of the full experience of this paternal relationship: but the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls will, if we ask Him earnestly, increase the number of our chief pastors; and in the meanwhile we can at least exercise ourselves in this personal submission, which is one real test of a Christian.

as from learned men, from the rich who are made low by self-knowledge, and the poor widow who has an abundant store for others in her habit of devotion, a mighty stream of penitent and faithful supplication for the unity, in God's good time, of the Church throughout the world:—

“O GOD the FATHER of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, our only SAVIOUR, the Prince of Peace, give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that, as there is but One Body, and One SPIRIT, and One Hope of our calling, One LORD, One Faith, One Baptism, One GOD and FATHER of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart, and of one soul, united in one holy bond of Truth and Peace, of Faith and Charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify Thee, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD.”¹

Let that be our earnest, loving, faithful prayer, offered continually in unison with the Mediator's intercession, and in lowly deference to His FATHER's will, and out of the deep reality of the love of the SPIRIT. It will be effectual, sooner or later, not only for its own glorious object, but also for the persuasion, through the Church's oneness, of those who range apart from her and from her LORD and Head.

¹ The service for the 20th of June.

XXIX.

WEARINESS.

DANIEL x. 1.

"The thing was true, but the time appointed was long."

ONE of the trials which Daniel the prophet had to undergo, amid the abundance of the revelations delivered to him, lay in the length of time (stretching forward either in apparently-uncertain duration, or evidently for ages upon ages, or at least far beyond the limits of his own earthly life) during which the fulfilment of a prediction had to be expected. Now, for instance, it is said to him, after one of these overwhelming¹ prophecies, "The vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days." Now he finds that seventy weeks, that is, four hundred and ninety years, must pass, before "the desolations of Jerusalem" can be accomplished, and reconciliation made for iniquity, and everlasting righteousness brought in, and the Most Holy

¹ Dan. viii. 26, 27. Immediately after this he "fainted, and was sick certain days."

anointed.¹ Now again, though the angel comes to make him understand what is to befall his people in the latter days—"the vision," he is assured, "is yet for many days."² And now, though his mind is carried on to the great awakening of the final resurrection, he hears only a mysterious announcement which he cannot fathom, as to how long it should be to the end of these wonders of God.³ And so at length, in the answer made to his anxiously-repeated inquiry, we are brought to the very last words of that marvellous record—words which at once state the trial, and encourage him not to faint under it: "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."⁴

For us also there has been marked out this same need of endurance. Even these trials which we have briefly glanced at are so manifold, so sifting, so wide in their range, so deep in their reach, so continually reappearing, that, taken either singly or together, they constitute a prolonged probation of our faith and patience; and the weariness engendered hereby may well require from us, as it were, a separate treatment, in order that we may strengthen one another, not only to go through the sharp pains of some sudden attack, some unforeseen loss, some occasional burden or fear, but also to bear the life-long disappointments

¹ Dan. ix. 2, 24.

² Dan. x. 14.

³ Ibid. xii. 2, 6, 7.

⁴ Ibid. v. 13.

and difficulties and dangers which keep the cross ever before the Christian.

Most of us have some experience of this lengthened testing of character; most of us, I mean, who do in faith, worship, and action name the Name of CHRIST, and who know what it is to rejoice in the SAVIOUR'S service, and to look forward to His coming with the crown of life. We believe what He has been pleased to reveal to us about Himself and His Kingdom and His righteousness, and the way wherein we must walk to attain thereto. Only, we find it by no means easy to keep on in that narrow, thorny path, or to fight to the very sunset, or to hold fast the hope, whatever happens, or to raise the high standard always in the midst of constantly-depressing influences, or to have daily courage in daily loneliness, or to "let patience have her perfect work."¹

Are we being chastened of the LORD, in some of the strange methods which He uses for His servants? Well, we know the exhortation which speaketh unto us as unto children, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of His correction; for whom the LORD loveth He correcteth."² We feel assured that the thing is true, but the time appointed is long.

Are we constrained to carry the cross without any helper to support us: the hidden cross which seems almost burnt into our flesh, though no man or woman

¹ S. James i. 4.

² Prov. iii. 11, 12.

perceives it, the ever-present cross, which, like some dull aching pain, is so wearing though so secret? We know that, if we suffer, we shall also reign with CHRIST. The promise we count most true, only the accomplishment appears to us so far away.

Have we to go through the weariness of a long struggle against a special sin, a subtle habit of evil? Again and again, our priest and our conscience, the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Church, repeat to us our LORD's own precious word: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne."¹ And we thank God that this saying is so true, yet fall down disheartened, because the battle lasts so long.

Are we learning to watch, like sentinels on guard? There is much to distract us, much to deaden us in sleep, much even to take us off for a space to the alien hosts of the wicked. Ever and anon indeed we listen to the voice of Him Whose shape we never saw, "Behold! I come quickly."² We are certified that it is His voice, we are often telling others that it is so, and warning them to be ready; but it is as if our LORD were delaying His coming.

Is it part of our trial to be apparently working in vain—to see no fruit of our labours in the Church, no lasting result of our careful teaching, no positive blessing as yet upon those whom we have prayed for, many days? Not seldom is it borne in upon us, that

¹ Rev. iii. 21.

² Rev. xxii. 12.

we are still to be "abounding in the work of the LORD," since in Him it shall not be in vain.¹ Surely, we say to ourselves, the thing is true, but the time appointed is long.

When such as these are the thoughts of those around, how earnestly one desires, though oneself devoid of the tongue of the learned, to have some measure of that wisdom from above which would enable the heart to speak a word in season to him that is weary ! Possibly there may be, by God's blessing, a little aid even in such suggestions as these.

1. First, let us be fully persuaded in our own minds; and if not, let us every day beseech God to give us this fulness of persuasion, that the thing is true, that the revelation is real and sufficient. To us, even more than to the prophets of the Old Testament, even more than to the Apostles of the New Testament, light has been granted in abundance ; and we need not fancy that the Church has been following cunningly-devised fables, through all these centuries of alternate persecution and patronage at the hands of a changing world. We have not stood, indeed, with Moses or Elijah, face to Face with God, or obtained His direct inspiration as did Jeremiah or Ezekiel. But we have witnessed the glorious effect wrought on earth in the Name of Him Whom these foretold and typified, and Whose Life and Death did seal all earlier revelation. We have not been, as

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 58.

were the chosen three, upon the Holy Mount, and heard the converse of the LORD of Glory with His saints of old, nor have we even, like the faithful and the doubtful of those days, seen in the Risen SAVIOUR'S Body the print of the nails. But we have a "*more* sure word of prophecy"¹—more sure, because we can mark in the gradually disclosed Gospel of CHRIST the completion of the types and prophecies, and in His slowly unfolding work in the world, the proof of His truth and of His Foreknowledge.

2. Therefore next, in all matters of faith, "blessed is he that waiteth."² Daniel gave forth his utterance, and was content to live and die, far off from the home for which he yearned, doing, with loyalty, to GOD, the business of the king of Persia. Hundreds of years went by; the wonderful predictions were, to all appearance, still floating in the air; could it be that the thing was not true, because the time had been so long? Suddenly One is found among those who were waiting for the Consolation of Israel, —at first a babe in arms, then an obedient child, then a labouring man, then He begins a ministry, then *in the midst of that last week of years*, three years and a half after His Baptism, He dies;³ Mes-

¹ 2 S. Peter i. 19.

² Dan. xii. 12.

³ Those who wish to understand the prophecy of the "seventy weeks" (Dan. ix. 2, 24—26) should by all means study Dr. Pusey's "Lectures on Daniel the Prophet" (iv.)—"Unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks and three score and two weeks"—i. e. the first

siah is cut off, but not for Himself. He dies for our sins, He rises for our justification, He ascends up where He was before. His SPIRIT, the HOLY GHOST, comes down to be another Comforter, that He may abide with us for ever; and the Church is before us; yes! we are in the Church, in token that the Truth can never fail, however long may be the expectation of its triumph.¹ What mattered it to Daniel whether he was in the body or out of the body at the completion of "the visions of God?" what mattered it to him, resting as he did in the world of spirits, how long it should be ere those who waited, generation after generation, could 'see, as Simeon saw at last, the salvation of God? The thing was true, and that was enough for him. Let us too, brethren, whatever be the dimness which enshrouds the future, leave that to Him Who alone knoweth what is in the darkness,

483 years of the whole period of 490 years, the last seven being parted off. "But 483 years from the month Nisan, 458 B.C., in which Ezra had his own mission from Artaxerxes, and began his journey, were completed at Nisan, 26 A.D., which (according to the ordinary belief that the Nativity was four years earlier than our era,) would coincide with John's Baptism, soon after the beginning of which, the descent of the HOLY GHOST upon our LORD at His Baptism manifested Him to be the Anointed with the HOLY GHOST, the CHRIST," the Messiah.—p. 170.

¹ See Dr. Pusey's "Lectures on Daniel the Prophet," p. 230. "The prophecies of Daniel explain both the previous tranquillity in that long winter which lay upon them, and that sudden burst and glow of spring-like hope, all nature ready to expand and welcome Him, when the Sun was indeed to come and put forth His power."

and humbly say of all that is mysterious as of all that is prophetic in His Word, "These are the true sayings of God."¹ Eternity will discover all the secrets of time; and a thousand years will seem as nothing then, to have waited for the end of these strange truths, for the explanation of all these passing trials and afflictions.

3. And then, as to what, in our earthly reckoning, counts for a long time with us. It is, at all events, the *appointed* time—it is God's appointment. There is a mode of expressing that thought—a sort of fatalist doctrine—which would make us fold our hands, and neglect the work which is given us to finish; as if, whatever we might do, the issue would certainly be the same. But it is quite possible, and indeed very necessary, to regard the allotted time as portioned out by the LORD our Maker, and yet since even this apportionment is something hidden from us, to assure ourselves, that in every one of these days, be they many or few, we must be exercised in the Divine discipline, and taught loving submission to the Divine will, and trained in the upward course of Divine perfection. When such is our spirit, how comforting it is for us to remember, that the longest trials are dispensations of God for us, and that therefore, whenever there is a continuance of the suffering "He giveth more grace!"²

4. And this may help us to realize a very common

¹ Rev. xix. 9.

² S. James iv. 6.

but sadly-neglected duty—the duty of not forestalling the future. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”¹ If we would only recollect, that the same God Who increaseth grace begins it also, and that He whose commanding Eye extends over the whole line of our march, and all the fields of our long campaign, can also guide and uphold us on this one steep hill, and in this closely imminent attack, we should not add to our burden by questioning how we can possibly abide for a week, a month, or a year, but should rather feel ashamed that in *this* day which is ours, we “have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin,”² and should bend ourselves to endure hardness now, as good soldiers of JESUS CHRIST. God will not suffer us to be tempted this night above that which we are able to bear: why need we fear to-morrow’s wrestling with our body? God guards us this morning from the attractions of the world: why should we dread a relapse this evening? God is keeping us, at this moment, secretly in His tabernacle from the strife of tongues: why should we shrink from a few more days, if so be, of calumny or of reproach? “The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.”³

5. But if at times you do use the privilege of your human nature, and glance on, as the beasts that perish never can do for a single hour, beyond this passing day, do so always as with the mind of a man

¹ S. Matth. vi. 34.

² Heb. xii. 4.

³ S. Matth. vi. 34.

and the heart of a Christian—always with something of that spirit which breathes through the Psalmist's threefold remedy: "I look for the LORD: my soul doth wait for Him: in His word is my trust."¹ There are the clouds on the horizon, but He cometh with the clouds—shall I not see Him? There will be the former difficulties, the old temptations, the same sorrows to be expected: but amid them all my soul will still find Him. There may be, as in earlier days, yes, as in days long gone by, questionings and disputings, doubts and uncertainties; but the same heaven-sent word which silenced them before—the same guardian Church which settled them for us centuries ago—will defend and enlighten us still; and in that word, so delivered, will I trust.

6. One thought more—surely the best of all. If, as we know so well from these very Scriptures, so well from the histories and confessions of men of our own generation, so well from the speaking witness of the faithful martyrs, many and many a soul has actually prevailed even in contests so prolonged, and gained a thorough victory at last—let us recollect what it was, above all things, which bore them through and made them more than conquerors. They persevered, not only like the holy patriarchs, as seeing Him that is invisible, but also as considering Him Who for us men came down from heaven and was made Man, and endured the Cross, despising the shame. The

¹ Ps. cxxx. 5.

daily suffering and the awful dying of the LORD JESUS became to them not only a Pattern, but a Power, whereby to learn, in spite of self, how to take pleasure in infirmities, and even daily to die. Look thus upon the LORD Who gave Himself for you; and then, while around you even the young men shall utterly fall, you shall so wait upon that LORD—so love Him in His chastenings—so suffer with Him here, that day by day, you shall renew your strength, when it might seem exhausted, yes, so that you may run and not be weary, and walk and not faint:¹ serving God alike in the speedy diligence and the slow endurance of a truly Christian life. Would it not be worth any sacrifice—years of painful discipline and steady toil under the Cross—to have gained for yourself in the continual contemplation of CHRIST crucified, the secret of “the patience of the saints?”²

¹ Isa. xl. 30, 31.

² Rev. xiv. 12.

XXX.

THE CONVERGING POWER OF MANY TRIALS.

1 S. PET. I. 6.

"For a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations."

IT takes many trials, many sufferings, to form the Christian character perfectly. And yet, what a strain it puts upon us, to find ourselves saddened alike by the past and by the present, disturbed by fightings as well as by fears, heavy laden and also sorely tempted, distracted through the allurements of the world, and at the same time hindered by the crafty wiliness of our own heart, discouraged by the thought that we are far off from God, and yet alarmed by the sense of our awful nearness to Him, endangered by our knowledge, and still depressed by our ignorance, wearied by the divisions of the Mystical Body of our One Lord, and by the loneliness which we experience as apparently isolated members of the Church, terrified by the darkness round the

Crucified, and none the less by the clear light shining upon the Cross which we are evidently called upon to bear for ourselves.

How far, indeed, any of us may have felt this converging power, in the testing of our spiritual life—*how* manifold have been our own special temptations, our own peculiar trials, will not be known to others till we come out of these our tribulations at the last Great Day, and thank God, with the joy of those redeemed for ever, for the strange and blessed work which He has wrought in each of us. Yet the bitter experience of our common nature suggests to us, not only the individual distresses of the brotherhood, but also the accumulation of ills—that sorrow upon sorrow—to which the souls of most men will bear witness in the solemn retrospect of years. And so there will be an answer (who can doubt it?) from some sad hearts, even to the very poor words of help brought forward here, and a willingness engendered in them to accept those aids and consolations which are so infinitely above what we can minister, and which are, of course, the only groundwork of human remedies for the afflictions of the children of God.

Now, as on the one hand, one would not be so presumptuous as to imagine that the subjects touched upon in this brief summary amount to a complete enumeration of all the secret trials of the Christian life, so neither is it likely that even these have all of them been felt personally by many of

the Lord's servants. Only those of us who need great chastening have been chastened greatly;¹ and the brighter, if not happier lot of the rest, is a gift of God bestowed upon His more faithful sons and daughters, because they swerve not from His commandments. But since "we count them *happy* which endure,"² and since with most of us the real question is not "must I expect to be tried?" but "what is God's purpose in these actual trials of mine, and how shall I meet them best?" it must be useful for us to commune with each other on such matters. Far better generally to do so, than, with the great saint of Ireland, "to chain down grief in the depths of our soul."³ How can we assist one another to grapple with the difficulties? How can we cheer one another on, under the prolonged agony of the inner life, and in full view of its many trials?

1. First, this state of things is exactly what our Lord prepared us for. "In the world ye shall have tribulation"—nay, more, "in the world ye *have* tribulation"⁴—it is your normal condition—that in which you will find yourselves day by day, because you belong to Me." So that, as Stier reminds us, we have, even in these inward distresses, "a comforting sign that we are not of the world."⁵ And the more of

¹ This is implied in the text—"If need be."

² S. James v. 11.

³ S. Columbanus, Epist. 4.

⁴ The word is *ἐχete*. S. John xvi. 33.

⁵ Reden Jesu, v. 440.

these, the more that we bear in the faith of that glorious Name, the surer grows the sign, the clearer the light from above in the testimony of our hearts. As it must truly be said, that "if in this life only we had hope in CHRIST, we should be of all men most miserable,"¹ so if we had but the least chance, and nothing more, of working out our salvation through these keen afflictions, they would be to us far greater joys than all present delights could be with the awful possibility of eternal loss. But the Christian's hope is so well assured for that other world, the power of faith and of prayer is so very real to him, that he hesitates not to accept on earth, if God should send them, far heavier troubles even than those already given, knowing that he can suffer as a Christian, with a Christian's trust and a Christian's love, clinging to a most merciful Creator and Redeemer.

2. We suffer as Christians: in other words, however tumultuous the storm, in CHRIST we may have peace. *He* is our peace. The more restless the world, the more we must cleave to Him, "the Same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."² We must remember that our eternal calm will not merely be that of our highest moments here: "the earth must be *shattered*, before there is the calm of heaven."³ "In Me," is the word of the LORD.⁴ Round Him all are to be gathered—every eye is to centre in

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 19.

² Heb. xiii. 8.

³ Rev. E. M. Benson.

⁴ S. John xvi. 33.

Him—His heart explains each perplexity. In an orchestra, each player must look to the one conductor; if, instead, he considers the quick movements of the instruments beside him, he will go wrong and mar the music. He may have, as in the wonderful compositions of Sebastian Bach, but two or three notes to play, yet how hard these two or three may be, how grand in themselves and in their sequence, how necessary to the glorious fulness of the harmony! So is it in our spiritual life: for each of us there must often be slow movings, strange and painful trials, deep tones of sounding pain, and great searchings of heart. Yet, if we look beyond the immediate surroundings, to Him Who guides us with His Eye, all will be right,—

“All true, all faultless, all in tune.”

3. But next, when the pressure is very galling, and the dark path least plain, and the distractions especially numerous, there is great comfort for a Christian in that very simple yet thoroughly submissive prayer to God, “Thou hast known my soul in adversities.”¹ His is the perfect sympathy of perfect knowledge and of perfect love. Such a FATHER pitieth us always, for nothing is alien to Him which concerns His children.² Such a SAVIOUR cannot but be “touched with the feelings of our infirmities,” for “He was in all points tempted like as we are.”³

¹ Ps. xxxi. 7.

² Ps. ciii. 13.

³ Heb. iv. 15.

Such a consoling, strengthening Guide is not like a distant helper for us in our falls and cares, for He is in us, and our very body is His temple.¹ "O Holy, Blessed, and glorious Trinity, have mercy upon us : save us and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O LORD." Are we proving for ourselves the power of these petitions—the sustaining grace of this access which is ever open to us—the quieting, quickening, uplifting influence imparted, in a way and with a speed which none can gainsay, from Him which heareth the prayer ?

4. And then, further, He gives us an answer of peace in this respect—He shows us that though these many trials are all continued, each of them is a blessing : for they are all part of His work for us and in us. We cannot understand at times how it is that one individual can be called upon to endure so much—it seems, to our short-sighted wisdom, out of all proportion either to the requirements of his character, or to the equal ways of God. Much more should we think so, could we probe to their deepest depth the *hidden* afflictions of one thus tried. Yet what a Master-hand is labouring, night and day, upon that anxious, weary, often wilful, sometimes stubborn heart ! An eye-witness tells us that Michael Angelo "went to work with such impetuosity and fury of manner, that" one "feared almost every moment to see the block split into pieces. It would

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 19.

seem as if, inflamed by the idea of greatness which inspired him, this great man attacked with a species of fury the marble which concealed the statue."¹ It was to the genius, the apparent fierceness of such a sculptor that we owe those great creations which few of us can hope to see, but which have a world-wide fame—the *Pensiero* and the *Pietà*.² And must we not be certain, that He whose wisdom is infinite, and whose every touch is love, and whose anger is not for the penitent, is shaping, by the strokes of His severe and merciful discipline, the soul of His suffering servant, into the measure of the stature of the fulness of CHRIST, the spotless Beauty of the Example of God's Incarnate SON? Nay! which of us would shrink from the blows which are aimed, with such a purpose, by Him Who is the finisher as well as the Author of our faith? Can any trial be dispensed with, if it come from Him?

5. Yet another thought will reconcile us still more to the burden which weighs upon us so heavily. Ought we not to suffer such things, because of our fellowship with the Divine Sufferer, in order to enter into His glory? We do not merely realize the like-

¹ *Blaise de Vignère*, quoted by Mrs. Jameson ("Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters," p. 213.)

² The statue called *Il Pensiero* (Meditation) is that of Duke Lorenzo de' Medici, in the Church of San Lorenzo at Florence. The *Pietà* is the group of the dead CHRIST on the knees of His Virgin Mother, now in the Church of S. Peter at Rome.

lihood of the dying members being with the dying Head. Rather, as remembering His sinlessness and our most grievous evil doing, we see that we suffer justly, and that if even He, in His Human Nature, was made "perfect through sufferings,"¹ we can only think it an undeserved privilege to be partakers in some sort, not indeed of the Cross of Calvary, but of that mortified Life which was the Calvary to that final Cross. And if on that Cross itself a portion of His bitterness was incommunicably awful, may not the recollection of this brace us to the endurance of those tremendous griefs and cares which we must carry by ourselves? "It is enough," surely, "for the disciple that he be as his Master."²

6. We know how the martyrs of old did thus strengthen themselves in JESUS CHRIST, ready as they were to go through fire and water in the patient imitation of Him Who had called them to follow Him not only in constant self-denial, but also in the daily bearing of the cross. Often and often, as they thus went after Him, in a few short weeks they fulfilled a long time, and were counted worthy of that rest in Paradise which brought them closer to their LORD. It is different now. In those early ages of our religion persecutions shortened the path to heaven; but we must have instead long penitence and trial. Only, we are not singular in this, for "the same afflictions are accomplished in" our "brethren that are in the

¹ Heb. ii. 10.

² S. Matth. x. 25.

world.”¹ And the halo of glory which *seemed* to abide only on the great saints then, may be our very own, however lowly our place, through these multiplied opportunities which we have of enduring hardness. Our influence may apparently extend over a very narrow sphere, yet even so shall our patience win others to God, and our victories be blessings and encouragements to them. If, though in secret, we bend ourselves to bear much for the sake of JESUS, we may prove a very crown of rejoicing—a bright, attractive, persuasive example to our fainting fellow-servants in the after time. The roses of S. Francis may spring from the thorns of S. Benedict. Surely, these unseen trials are training up “immense reserves” of men, to recruit, either visibly while they are still in the body, or invisibly when they have joined the spiritual hosts, the ranks of those soldiers of the Cross already openly engaged in battling with the world and with its prince.

7. But how shall we fight? how shall we hold up our weakened hands, our feeble knees, under this prolonged resistance unto blood, this combined attack of many trials known only to ourselves and God? The answer is a very simple one, but surely sufficient. Many trials imply manifold aid from above; for each has its proper remedy, its corresponding grace. Wherever there is a difficulty in the Christian life, there is found in CHRIST, Whose life it is, a power of

¹ 1 S. Peter v. 9.

conquering; wherever there is a temptation, there is, in Him, a way to escape; wherever there is a sorrow, there is, in Him, some effectual consolation; whenever we must bear some burden for ourselves, His Love, His Strength, can lighten it to us; when the battle seems going most against us, He, the Captain of our salvation, is close by our side, bidding us still to quit ourselves like men for Him; yes, and even when our own sad thoughts have been filling us with anxiety and pain, the old habit of prayer, which we would not forego, because we learnt it from our mother, has restored to us His Peace, so that the Psalmist's thanksgiving becomes very real to ourselves: "In the *multitude* of the sorrows that I had in my heart, Thy comforts have refreshed my soul."¹ Surely, the experience of every *possible* tribulation would show us that He is "the God of *all* grace."²

8. If such are His aids, His benefits, His satisfactions here, what shall there be hereafter? We have not faculties to comprehend that "eternal weight of glory,"³ which is set against the light affliction of this perishing world. But the undoubted joy we have, even in the midst of sufferings which are very real, in the imparted grace, the happy service of God Whom we have never seen, may be some token to us of that gladness which shall be ours in His actual Presence, when all imperfection, all sor-

¹ Ps. xciv. 19.

² 1 S. Peter v. 10.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

row, all sin, all death, shall be for ever passed away. The very fact indeed, that we do not yet behold Him as He is, constitutes one of our trials; for it compels us to believe that which we cannot see. Yet He Himself assures us, that while we are here, it is more blessed for us to believe though we see Him not.¹ It tries us, but the trial strengthens us, for it teaches us to trust in Him and not in ourselves.

And are not all these things of which we have been speaking, trials of our *faith*? But the trial of our faith—not the faith merely, but the trial of it²—is very precious before God; right dear in His sight are the things we suffer, the furnace which makes us acceptable to Him, the afflictions which are gradually conforming us to the Likeness of His Beloved. All these which are working together for our good, are, if we may say so, of great price with Him. And, knowing that, we are enabled, little by little, to endure with patience first, then in peace, at last even glorying therein. The salvation of eternity opens out to us, as, in the might of God, we bravely bear the afflictions of time; and contemplating that endless day we greatly rejoice, even though, for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations.

So real is the Christian life, so real its foundation, so

¹ S. John xx. 29.

² See the words used by S. Peter, I. i. 6—8.

real its work, so real its consolations in all trials, its strength amid every weakness, its present joy throughout the most various distresses. *One would not be anything but a Christian, for the world.* Let us not imagine for a moment that it is a mere *apology* which is here offered for the Christian life—a faint and halting suggestion to the brethren to continue faithful to the end, as if the balance of probability were slightly in our favour. Rather, a necessity is laid upon us all who name that Name—even on such a one as the writer, till greater helpers rise up—to show the one Refuge from the overwhelming flood, and to lead men out of the world, through the blessedness of trials, into the Heart and Life, the Love and Power, of our LORD. It is asked of course, “Why, if all these trials are incident to your Religion, should you cling to it still? how, at least, can you expect others, not only in spite of these, but because of them, to cast in their lot with you?” We need not hesitate as to the reply: we have abundant reason in the fact of a Christian’s bright and blessed experience in faith and life. He knows, that with all such sorrows and siftings as these, he has joys, strengthenings, consolations, absolutely hidden from this world and from its children. Good Friday, with its light out of darkness; Easter Day, with its triumphant Alleluias; the quiet gladness of the Holy Communion; the private study of the matchless character of JESUS; the intense interest of the unfolding of prophecy, the

personal guidances and direct answers of God—these are but instances of the Divine secrets granted to the righteous, lacking so often to you and me because we will not yield ourselves to the SPIRIT of the LORD. In us too, there has been more of the world than of the CHRIST. Happy for us, if we have learnt at last, in time to profit by it, the startling lesson of the old Breton proverb, that “he who will not answer to the rudder must answer to the rocks.” And can we, knowing what God has done for our souls, faithlessly doubt whether it is possible to guide any man of the world into that Christian life which is so full of those secret trials—the wonderful work of God? We are all of us on the deep: out of the deep we are all of us, with the voice of our inner self, calling unto God. How many of the saints have been thus drawn, from the sorrows of the world, into that godly sorrow which worketh repentance first, and then teaches us to pass through every affliction of the kingdom, to its everlasting salvation and its crown that fadeth not away!

The Home of all the secret ones of Jesus has mansions for us still; but the way is narrow, and the time is short. Very soon the trial will be completed, and His people then, (whether we are among them or not,) will be “all righteous.”¹ In that holiness, which alone can make them happy before the Holy God, they shall sorrow no more; and, for their past afflictions, God shall wipe away all tears from their

¹ Isa. lx. 21.

eyes. Then, "when He shall come to be glorified in His Saints, and to be admired in all them that believe,"¹ the Divine Beauty of His perfect Character shall be seen in the bodies made celestial, the souls for ever purified, of those whom He loved and chastened; and every trial, though unknown of men, if rightly borne and duly used on earth, shall "be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of JESUS CHRIST."²

¹ 2 Thess. i. 10.

² 1 S. Peter i. 7.



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